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ABSTRACT

A year-long qualitative study constructed a "thick" (rich, literal) description and interpretation of the social organization, interactions, and attitudes displayed within one self-contained second-grade classroom during its scholastic language arts activities and instruction to explain how a literacy learning environment can be seen as effective through the eyes of the students, teacher, and instructional assistants. This interpretive-ethnographic research relies on symbolic interactionism as it attempts to explore ways qualitative research can enhance classroom practice of teacher/ researchers. Data were collected through participant observation and interviewing using inductive analysis of classroom artifacts and interactions among children, teacher, and instructional assistants. Multiple collection procedures allowed triangulation of observation, fieldnotes, interviews, and audio/video tapes. Interrater reliability was obtained. Findings emerged from the data as five interactive areas which significantly impacted this classroom: (1) teacher's philosophy of education and literacy environment; (2) importance of building community in the classroom; (3) power of the process approach to literacy; (4) choice as an essential aspect of learning; (5) enjoyment, enthusiasm, and pride as contagious components. Findings further showed that media tapings enabled the teacher/researcher to alter perspectives and suggested implications for future studies in which qualitative research can enhance classroom practice. (Contains 64 references and appendixes A-J of research materials.) (Author/TB)

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ED 405 587

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CELEBRATING THE UNEXPECTED: A MICROETHNOGRAPHY OF ONE EARLY CHILDHOOD PROCESS-ORIENTED LANGUAGE ARTS CLASSROOM

by

MARGARET T. CHERRY

Ed.S. Project

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements
for the degree of Educational Specialist
in the Program of Curriculum and Instruction
in the School of Education
of The Graduate School of
The University of Alabama at Birmingham

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CELEBRATING THE UNEXPECTED:
A MICROETHNOGRAPHY* OF ONE EARLY CHILDHOOD PROCESS-ORIENTED LANGUAGE ARTS CLASSROOM

*The term, *"microethnography"*, as used here, refers to an in-depth, qualitative case-study which attempts to construct, through use of *thick* (rich, literal) description over time, a systematic understanding of a segment of culture (here, a classroom) using ethnographic analysis to "...search for the parts of a culture, the relationships among the parts, and the relationships to the whole" (Spradley, 1980, p. 116.)

All names of places and people, excluding that of the author, have been changed in an attempt to preserve anonymity of the subjects involved in this study.

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ABSTRACT

"CELEBRATING THE UNEXPECTED: A MICROETHNOGRAPHY* OF ONE EARLY CHILDHOOD PROCESS-ORIENTED LANGUAGE ARTS CLASSROOM"

The purpose of this year-long qualitative study was to construct a *thick* (rich, literal) description and interpretation of the social organization, interactions, and attitudes displayed within one self-contained second-grade classroom during its holistic language arts activities and instruction to explain how a literacy learning environment can be seen as effective through the eyes of the students, teacher, and instructional assistants. This interpretive-ethnographic research relies on symbolic interactionism as it attempts to explore ways qualitative research can enhance classroom practice of teacher/researchers.

Data were collected through participant observation and interviewing, using inductive analysis of classroom artifacts and interactions among children, teacher, and instructional assistants. Multiple collection procedures allowed triangulation of observations, fieldnotes, interviews, and audio/video tapes. Interrater reliability was obtained.

Findings emerged from the data as five interactive areas which significantly impacted this classroom: 1) teacher's philosophy of education and literacy environment, 2) importance of building community in the classroom, 3) power of the process approach to literacy, 4) choice as an essential aspect of learning, and 5) enjoyment, enthusiasm, and pride as contagious components. Findings further revealed that media tapings enabled the teacher/researcher to alter practioner perspectives and suggested implications for future studies in which qualitative research can enhance classroom practice.

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PROLOGUE

During my twenty-three years of teaching in grades one, two, and three, I have seen many trends come and go in early childhood education. I have felt intense personal frustration as well as profound personal satisfaction in my endeavors as a classroom teacher through the years.

Those opposing extremes of my profession have never been greater than during the decades of the 1980's and 1990's. Negative press for educators and education has bombarded this field during these last two decades, partially robbing us of earlier feelings of support and esteem from those outside the educational community. Self-doubt as to my own effectiveness and methods began to plague me as I re-assumed the role of student following eighteen years as an instructor. Personal confusion reigned as I tried to correlate ideas accepted by the educational establishment as "tried and true" with radically different methods and thought processes I learned as a student in the master's program. It was not until I entered the Ed.S. program that I realized I had truly assimilated new ways of thinking and had constructed for myself one meaningful whole from the information I had received. I was finally able to trust my own autonomy and to recognize that I had a significant contribution to make to my students

Following several personally traumatic experiences, I have been able to learn acceptance of myself -- just as I am; acceptance of others -- just as they are; and valuing of each day -- just as it is. I have learned that I am responsible for my own choices, not for choices of others. I have chosen to be content and at peace and am learning to share that philosophy with those around me. This change of attitude on my part has enhanced my own life. It has brought a remarkable change in my relationships with those with whom I am in close contact, becoming particularly apparent within my classroom. It is this positive change I wish to document through this project.

This project was conducted as a qualitative study. From the outset I was interested in what would enhance the literacy environment in my own classroom. I had read the literature and had gained insight through many graduate courses, but I wanted to see how much was *really* applicable within my own setting. I did not want just *theory*; I wanted *practicality*. I was not out to prove anything new or to come up with a radically different interpretation. I merely wanted to find out what would

really work for me and my students. It is not new. It simply works.

I have chosen in this paper not to separate the literature into a separate section as would be done in a quantitative study. The literature is an integral part of this qualitative work due to the fact that I only *applied* the ideas of other researchers to my own context; therefore, I feel the research must be documented throughout each section of this paper.

My work fell almost neatly into five chapters: the effects of the philosophy of education and the literacy environment held by the teacher/researcher; the importance of building community in the classroom; the power of the process approach to literacy learning; choice as an essential aspect of literacy learning; and enjoyment, enthusiasm, and pride as contagious components of the whole.

It is my hope that the powerful positive changes observed within my classroom which so changed my perspective and that of the students, instructional assistants, administrators, and parents, will encourage other educators to seek their own combination of ideas available through searches of the literature and their own experience. We can all experience joys and successes as we touch the lives of children.

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Recent research (Fosnot, 1989; Kamii, 1979, 1989, 1990; Smith, 1980) calls for major pedagogical changes in education or, more simply, transformations in the art/science of teaching. Educators are exhorted to ". . . change the way we think about children and their learning and development " (Grover, 1990, p. 59). Kamii challenges us to ". . . shift the focus of our attention from what the teacher does to how children learn " (Kamii & Joseph, 1989, p. x). She further admonishes us, "If we really want independent, creative thinkers who have initiative, confidence, and moral autonomy[1], we must seriously foster these qualities, from the beginning of children's lives. What education needs is . . . a fundamental reexamination of our goals and objectives, and of the ways in which we try to attain these goals" (p. 185).

There is a need for classroom practitioners, especially those with experience, to become researchers in their own classrooms. Fosnot (1989) calls for ". . . teachers who are decision makers, researchers, and articulate change agents" (p. xiii). Duckworth (1987), in her essay on teaching-research, says that ". . . curiosity about the nature of human knowledge can be seen to be an integral part of teaching, and . . . teaching-research in fact can further this kind of understanding" (p. xvi). She further proposes that ". . . one is in a position through teaching to pursue questions about the development of understanding that one could not pursue in any other way" (p. 134).

It is important for teachers to draw upon their experiences to explicitly state *what* they know, as well as *how* they feel and *why* they feel that way. Duckworth (1987) calls to our attention ". . . the importance of teachers' being aware of their own knowledge and feelings" (p. xv).

More qualitative research is needed to explain the complexities inherent within a self-contained early-childhood language arts classroom and a description of how and why a teacher facilitates children's learning. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) assert: ". . . it is our belief that all educators can be more effective by employing qualitative research in their work" (p. 207). This study attempts to add to the current body of knowledge concerning the ways children gain meaning through language literacy experiences supported by an environment which fosters the construction of knowledge by students and a teacher who attempts to facilitate learning.

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[1] Kamii (1989) clarified Piaget's meaning of "moral autonomy" as the governing of oneself by personal beliefs of what is right, independent of rewards or punishments.

Bogdan and Biklen(1982) caution readers of qualitative research to remember that research questions are formulated in the qualitative field to investigate the complexities of a situation *in context.* As Spradley (1980) says, "Ethnographic research involves open-ended inquiry" (p. 34). Bogdan and Biklen affirm that qualitative researchers need to begin a study with a focus but not with specific hypotheses to test or exact questions to be answered. One of the strengths of qualitative work is that the researcher goes into the study without preconceived notions of what the research findings will be. In qualitative research, the researcher is the key instrument and obtains data directly from the natural setting. These same authorities tell us that such research is descriptive, that qualitative researchers are more concerned with *process* than *product* or *outcome*, and that the abstractions are built as the data are inductively analyzed. The analysis is carried out in a cyclical, rather than a linear manner. The researcher formulates a tentative ethnographic question, gathers data, begins analyzing it, which generates more questions, which necessitates the gathering of more data, requiring further analysis and so on until a point of saturation is reached. (This is the point at which the data become so repetitive as to fail to add anything new to the study.)

Glaser and Strauss (1967) call this theory, which is developed from many disparate pieces of data which have been collected and analyzed in order to make connections and generalize theory, *grounded theory.* As Bogdan and Biklen express it, ". . . [Y]ou are constructing a picture which takes shape as you collect and examine the parts" (1982, p. 29).

Because "'meaning' is of essential concern to the qualitative approach" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 29), researchers rely on theoretical underpinnings of interpretive-ethnographic research which rest on symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism has three premises, according to Blumer (1969):

- . . . human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them . . .
- . . . the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows . . . [and]
- . . . these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters (p. 2).

Qualitative research is a double-sided proposition. The negatives of such research for the researcher are mountainous amounts of data to be gathered, coded,

analyzed, filed, retrieved, re-analyzed, and written-up. Accessing it is the negative for the readers because they have to wade through lengthy studies filled with verbiage. On the positive side, however, this very preoccupation with detail is the heart and strength of qualitative research. The analysis of so much detail invariably reveals new insights into the research subjects and setting, changing perspectives, and allowing growth in thinking. For the reader, thick description and rich detail allow an *insider* view that is often missing in quantitative research. It is the exploration of the "hows" and "whys" of situations that allow expanded understanding of the process of learning/teaching.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this ethnographic study was to construct a *thick* (rich, literal) description and interpretation of the social organization, interactions, and attitudes displayed within a self-contained second-grade classroom during language arts activities and instruction, using inductive analysis of the actions of, between, and among the children, their teacher, and three classroom instructional assistants. The ethnographic case study design suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (1982) was chosen as the most appropriate procedure for this qualitative study.

This study also attempted to add to the body of knowledge concerning ways qualitative research can enhance the classroom practice of teacher/ researchers.

The year-long intensive study of my own classroom was also for purposes of modifying conditions to facilitate instruction and encourage positive attitudes toward learning and self-direction in gaining meaning. The focus was on the children with some reference made to the facilitating actions of the teacher, together with observations by the instructional assistants.

This research question guided the collecting of the data:

- *How can a literacy learning environment be seen as effective through the eyes of the students, the teacher, and the classroom instructional assistants?*

Subsumed under this question are these thoughts:

- *How do students perceive themselves as successful/important individuals?* and
- *How can a combination of teacher-held beliefs and practices alter students' literacy learning?*

Selection of the Subjects of the Study

Because of immediate access to my own classroom and due to time restrictions and job requirements which would not permit my observing in other classrooms, as well as knowledge that other researchers were calling for in-depth descriptions of classrooms by teacher-researchers, I elected to do a case study of my own second-grade classroom. I had immediate access to the site and students through my contractual obligations.

Researcher Role, Data Collection, and Analysis

Methods of data collection used in this qualitative study were participant observation, formal and informal interviewing, and the gathering of artifacts from the classroom following the procedures of three qualitative researchers (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Seidman, 1991; and Spradley, 1980).

As I assumed the role of participant-observer, I became the research instrument, attempting to produce a broad spectrum of details of daily life in the classroom in order to generate a *thick* description of spoken thoughts, actions, and interactions of students, the teacher, and the instructional assistants.
The year-long study of my classroom began with an exploratory phase early in the school year in which I established a caring, trusting, accepting relationship with my students as we began building a sense of community in our classroom.

Guided by my research questions, I collected primary data through observations which were recorded in the form of fieldnotes, interviews, and audio and video tapes. Classroom artifacts with fieldnotes were included throughout the school year. Permission for conducting the study with participation consent was gained from the parents, the students, the instructional assistants, the elementary assistant principal, the principal, and the coordinator of elementary education. Acknowledgment of participation in the project was made by the director of curriculum and instruction, the assistant superintendent in charge of instruction, and the superintendent of the system.

I used the ethnographic research cycle (Spradley, 1980) for collecting and analyzing data, starting with a broad ethnographic question, collecting ethnographic data, making an ethnographic record (through interviews, fieldnotes, audio and video tapes, and classroom artifacts), analyzing the data, which generated more questions, which continued the cycle. The constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) enabled me to collect and analyze the data simultaneously.

Each day I jotted down fieldnotes and fleshed them out at night, reading and re-reading them. At least three nights per week and on weekends, I transcribed audio and video tapes, reflecting on patterns and meanings, noting comments and insights gained. As patterns emerged, I began coding the emerging categories by using colored dots to distinguish between them in the notes.

Multiple collection procedures allowed triangulation of observations, fieldnotes, interviews, and audio/video tapes. Field notes and videotapings were triangulated with secondary data[2] to generate a description of the social organization, actions, and interactions within the class. The videotapes were viewed by more than one researcher in an attempt to obtain interrater reliability.

The "familiar was made strange" as described by Pierce (1990), by use of audio- and video-tapes. Observing the classroom through these media allowed me to step out of the role of teacher and into the role of researcher, or "outside" observer. I was able to notice patterns of behavior and body-language signals not observable from my "insider" position as classroom practitioner.

Celebrating the unexpected

A particular example which comes to mind in which classroom research altered practioner perspectives began with the use of fast-forwarding techniques which allowed me to spot extensive, almost constant, movement of some students. For instance, I counted 56 specific occurrences of body movement, ranging from extremely small ones to much larger ones, during a 25-minute period in which Mitchell, who had at that time been in the classroom only one month, was reading to the camera his self-selected book, Nate the Great, by Sharmat. Although Mitchell was reading the entire time and appeared, at first glance (as I observed during the actual occurrence), to be sitting still and quiet on the beanbag; reviewing the videotape enabled me to gain a new perspective on Mitchell as a person. Previously, I had thought that he had little concentration, that he could not stay with a task for an extended period of time without disrupting the activities of other students, and that he was deliberately intrusive. After viewing the videotape, I realized that he *could* stay with an activity for an extended period of time, *provided it was one in which he had sufficient interest*; he really *did* need body movement; and he was a very able reader whose speech impairment significantly interfered with my

[2] Secondary data in this instance refers to interviews with administrators, parents, instructional assistants, fifth-grade student partners, and my own students in an attempt to verify perspectives.

understanding of his processing abilities. I also discovered, to my surprise, that he did not *always* disrupt the class and that he was a capable, conscientious individual who had the potential to be an asset to our classroom community.

In order to transcribe any video, I had to watch it over and over, rewinding and fast-forwarding the tape in order to capture the entire episode in words. From the instance of my transcribing this videotape, *my whole attitude* about that child changed to a much more positive one. From that time, I constantly pointed out to him instances when he "did what good readers/writers do." This appeared to facilitate his viewing of himself as "smart" and as an asset to the class. By the end of the year, Mitchell was less disruptive and had been accepted by his peers as a contributing member of our community. When I realized the power of viewing that one instance as an "outsider," I realized that I will forevermore be a researcher in my own classroom in order to further come to know my students and to better guide my practice. (For a complete transcription of this videotape, see Appendix B.)

The example just cited gives proof to the assertion by qualitative researchers (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Pierce, 1990; Spradley, 1980) that nothing is too insignificant to be noted by qualitative researchers and that we must alternate between the perspectives of "insider" and "outsider," sometimes having both viewpoints at the same time. Further, we must make inferences. As Bogdan and Biklen (1982) affirm, "Data are both the evidence and the clues" (p. 73).

Categories generated from the data

Five categories of influence in the classroom emerged from the data as follows:

1. Philosophy of education and the literacy environment
2. Importance of building community in the classroom
3. Power of the process approach to literacy
4. Choice as an essential aspect of learning
5. Enjoyment, enthusiasm, and pride as contagious components of the whole

These categories have been separated in this project for ease of analysis but in actuality are closely-meshed, interactive parts of a whole. The component categories cannot be fully understood except as they are integrated with each other.

Organization of the Remainder of the Study

The remainder of the study, beginning with Chapter 2, the ethnographic context, includes a description of the community, school, and classroom in which the study takes place, as well as a rich description of the students, the classroom instructional assistants, and this teacher/researcher of the observed classroom.

Chapter 3 explains the philosophy of this teacher/researcher as it relates to education and the learning process, my understanding of my students, and my conception of language literacy learning and a literacy environment.

Chapter 4 clarifies the importance of building community in the classroom through a discussion of Peterson's book, Life in A Crowded Place, and its implications for this particular classroom and these students. This lengthy chapter cites specific instances which I regard as building blocks in establishing community in this classroom.

Chapter 5 contains a discussion of the power of the process approach to literacy. It begins with a discourse on language development as an outgrowth of thinking, affirms the acknowledging of different perspectives, discusses reading as a process nourished by good literature, continues by discussing ways becoming authors changes perspectives of students, followed by one interpretation of journal writing. The next area mentioned is spelling, then drafting and revising, followed by a section on writing which deals with the possibility of overworking its use. The chapter concludes with a quotation from Nancie Atwell on the possibilities for students and teachers participating in school as a *learning* workshop.

Chapter 6 explores choice as an essential aspect of learning, giving emphasis to different types of choices available to students in order to facilitate learning. This chapter begins discussing the wide variety of categories of choice and continues by speaking of choices in learning style, literature, and assignments. Classroom assistants appear to view choice as a very important aspect of the class setting in the next section. A one-hour photo segment allows insight into some choices occurring in the classroom. A Choice to Learn is an example of the interconnectedness of the categories of data which emerged from this study, while the next section points out that different students may choose to do the same thing for different reasons. The last section gives insight into moving toward autonomy through choice.

Enjoyment, enthusiasm, and pride as contagious components of the whole literacy environment and process are the focus of Chapter 7. Burton's book, Joy in Learning: Making It Happen in Early Childhood Classes, contributed greatly to this

chapter. Contagious positive attitudes are discussed. Poetry, laughter, and good feelings are explored through Shel Silverstein's poetry. Silliness becomes productive as the children, delighting in the antics of characters portrayed through "tongue-in-cheek" humor in Harry Allard and James Marshall's children's books, explore as authors their own silly themes. Shared happy times enjoyed while discussing illustrations of children's books become the focus of the next section of this chapter.

In Chapter 8, conclusions and implications of the study are discussed. This section includes a discussion of the findings, my position on the applicability of the study, and the limitations of the study.

The appendices contain information pertaining to time frame, samples of coded fieldnotes, a typical student interview, samples of student writings, samples of Polaroid snapshots, and a lengthy but revealing interview between the teacher/researcher and two instructional assistants. Final two appendices are a conversation/interview with the elementary principal and supportive documentation from administrators.

The last item is a figure which attempts to express the interconnectedness of the themes of this study.

A Cautionary Note to the Reader

The reader of this study will note a preoccupation on my part as teacher/researcher with the positive aspects of this classroom. This is in keeping with the purpose of this study which was to describe the social organization, interactions, and attitudes displayed; to modify conditions to facilitate learning; and to encourage positive attitudes toward learning and self-direction in gaining meaning. The subjectiveness of this study responds to the call by other researchers for teachers to explicitly call on their personal knowledge and feelings in studying their own classrooms, using the researcher as a research instrument in a qualitative study.

An Additional Note for the Reluctant Reader

For those readers unwilling to wade through all of the verbiage in this study, readings of the sections, "The Students," pp. 15-16; Celebrating the unexpected and the paragraph preceding it, p. 7, and "A Choice to Learn," pp. 68-69, will give the flavor of the situation and possibly allow a glimpse of the potential power of using a qualitative approach as teachers become researchers in their own classrooms. Appendices are also referenced back to the text for more detailed explanations.

CHAPTER 2

THE ETHNOGRAPHIC CONTEXT[3]

Introduction

A detailed description of the setting of this study is given in this chapter. First, the outer context of the community in which the students and teacher live is briefly described. Next, the context of the school, student body, and staff is discussed. A thick (rich, literal) description is given of the classroom proper. Finally, the students, instructional assistants, and teacher in the observed classroom are described.

The ethnographic context is described from a holistic perspective in order to establish a frame of reference for successive chapters in which classroom events have been separated into discrete categories for ease of analysis.

In order to protect the identities of those individuals involved, names of people involved and places described have been changed. Data about the school and community were obtained from records available through the current Performance Based Accreditation System (PBAS) reports which were prepared by school personnel. Other evaluations and school documents were obtained from the principal and classroom teacher.

The Community

The community serving this school is made up of a diverse mixture of families having a variety of occupations/professions, income levels, education levels, and attitudes toward society and education. The residents of the town are farmers, factory workers, store-owners, sales personnel, lawyers, judges, doctors, teachers, ministers, and laborers. This community is served by two separate school systems, each with a separate financial support system The city schools tend to draw from the more affluent families, while the county school consists of mostly rural, less materially advantaged families, although there is a mixture of socioeconomic levels served by each system.

The School, Student Body, and Staff

The school is a large K-12 school located literally across the tracks from a more affluent city high school. The school involved in this study suffered 3.5 million dollars' damage due to a fire which was set last year by a sixth-grade student. The

[3]Ethnographic context refers to a detailed description of the natural setting of qualitative research.

high school library, high school office complex, auditorium, two computer labs, and nineteen classrooms were lost in the fire. The school is now operating in twenty-five mobile units and the remaining portion of the original school. Intra-school communication and physical access have been impaired due to the less-than-adequate facilities.

It is the policy of the superintendent and board of education members who supervise the school to have heterogeneously grouped students in classes according to grade level. There is no provision for students to move through levels at their own pace unless such a provision is made by specific classroom teachers. Students are either passed, placed (if they fail to meet minimum standards for passing but have some extenuating circumstance -- such as having been retained previously, being served by classes for the learning disabled, etc.), or retained if they fail to meet promotion standards. Teachers are encouraged not to retain students.

Many unrelated influences affect the classroom curriculum in this school. The State Department of Education mandates a required course of study for each subject area. The central office administration of the board of education mandates a scope and sequence of objectives for each grade level and subject area. The central office administration requires every student in elementary grades to take the SAT each year, thus affecting classroom curriculum. Each grade is also required to prepare students for the state-mandated basic competency test. (This test is given in only certain grades, but every grade is held responsible for adequate preparation of its portion of the competencies. This also drives curriculum at each grade level.) State-mandated integrated reading and writing assessments are required at second, fifth, and seventh grade levels. All grades are held responsible for preparation for these assessments. The central office administration requires computerized testing of skill objectives which correlate with the adopted basal series in reading and in math. Teachers, of necessity, are forced to address these objectives.

The demographics of the school are as follows: the student body of the entire school is 21% black, 79% white, 50% male, 50% female; 19% have special needs; 50% receive free or reduced lunches; 52.6% of students live with one or neither parent. These figures were obtained from the PBAS Needs Assessment Study completed in March, 1994.

The large percentage of students from low income homes and the large number lacking traditional family units increase the risk factors for students. The fact that approximately one-third of the student population is transient is an added

risk factor for these students.

The students are taught in heterogeneously grouped, self-contained classrooms through third grade. In grades four through six, students remain grouped heterogeneously for much of the day, but they are taught in departmentalized settings. In grades seven through twelve, students are sorted into groups leading to standard or advanced diplomas. Most students attain the standard diploma (55%), with only 30% attaining advanced diplomas last year. Fifteen percent receive special education certificates. Most students accept jobs requiring vocational training.

Three administrators hold responsibility for operation of the school: the head principal, responsible for the overall decisions and effectiveness of the entire school, grades K-12; the high school assistant principal, in charge of buses and discipline; and the elementary assistant principal, virtually responsible for the entire elementary portion of the school (grades K-6) but who must defer to the head principal if there is a difference of opinion as to policy or operation. The band director doubles as elementary administrator in charge of discipline for half of each day.

The instructional staff members include 3 principals, 70 teachers (30 high school teachers, 36 elementary teachers, 4 itinerant teachers), 13 instructional assistants, 2 counselors,

The Classroom

Room 46 is a large, almost square room built in the 1950's. It was arranged with the old-fashioned, one-piece students' desks forming a large, almost circular pattern as far toward the outer walls of the room as possible, yet leaving sufficient space for walking behind the desks to reach the bookcases and other equipment ranged along the walls. Only the length of the green chalkboard at the "front" of the room kept the desks from completing the circle. Just outside the desks, toward the high, old-fashioned, windowed-wall were three large, square, fabric-covered foam pillows for use by students when working on the floor. The brightly-colored pillows were covered with fabric which looks like patched denim jeans, but which was actually sturdy polyester. A large, old, black vinyl beanbag, spilling some of its stuffing through a few small holes, was also available for use by students when working on the floor.

At the front of the classroom was a large, pock-marked, painted, green

chalkboard. There was a new color-monitor Macintosh LCII computer and printer on a small, wedge-shaped table at the left end of the board and an older computer on a matching table at the right end of the board. As there was not much available storage area in this room, two boxes of paper were stored under each computer table. Sitting below the center of the board was an old-fashioned, one-piece student desk with a slanted writing surface attached to the right side of the back of the desk. On this desk was an old, black, dust-covered tape player with a relatively new blue and white headset plugged into the left side of the player. Everything in this area of the room was filmed with chalkdust. Obviously the reason for having the electronic equipment in this dusty area of the room was that there was only one available plug for connecting equipment, and it was located below the center of the board. There was a plug strip with a surge protector to enable the equipment to be used simultaneously. The only other plug in the classroom was at the opposite end of the room in a spot which was not accessible for using computers due to a huge old wooden shelf unit, "glued" to the tile-covered floor by years of accumulated wax. The unsightly structure, located behind greeting card display racks filled with books, could not be moved, therefore limiting arrangement of the room.

From the doorway, one noticed that the remaining walls were filled with bookshelves and dilapidated old discarded greeting card display cases which were overflowing with books of every description, many of them torn and worn and apparently well-loved, while others were brightly covered in new bindings. There were baskets of recorded books in gallon-sized zip-lock bags on the top of one of the bookshelves. There were stacks of papers and textbooks covering every available spot on the remaining shelves. There was one display case, however, located separately from the others, on the window-wall, which held a very special commodity -- the revolving collection of library books which were checked-out from the local municipal library every two weeks. At any given time there were thirty-five to forty children's books overflowing the shelves of this case.

Off to the side of the room in an out-of-the-way corner was an old painted metal teacher's desk and a rickety wooden teacher's chair on rollers. These two items were used as depositories for student work and other "important" papers; they were rarely used by the teacher as a work area.

The Students

The class proper consisted of sixteen second-graders, ranging in age from seven years, seven months to nine years, five months, twelve of whom had never been retained in school, one who had repeated kindergarten, two who had repeated first grade, and one who had repeated second grade. Two additional students were mainstreamed into this class for brief portions of the day.

Reading scores on commercially prepared group and individual reading inventories given as required at the beginning of this academic year placed the students at levels ranging from second pre-primer level to second-grade level, with specific numbers of students as follows: three were at 2PP level, three at 3PP level, four at primer level, two at first reader level, two at second reader + level; two were new students who were not tested; the two students mainstreamed into the classroom from the EMR class were not tested in this classroom.

In the class proper there were originally eight boys and six girls, with one other boy entering in November and a second boy entering in January. Fifteen of the students were Euro-American, with only one African American boy in the class.

The economic composition of the class was reflected by the fact that seven students ate fully-paid lunches, four were served reduced-price lunches, and five qualified for free lunches.

The home situations of the students were varied: seven lived in homes with two-parents; two lived with one parent and one step-parent; one lived with only one parent due to divorce; one lived with one parent due to death of the other parent; four lived with grandparents who had custody due to abusive and neglectful parents; one lived with a great-grandmother and was cared for by an aunt, even though she lived next-door to her father and step-mother.

Several children had undergone such traumatic experiences that they required counseling. One received intensive counseling twice weekly during the entire school year, and one had previously received intensive counseling.

There were several children with special needs in this class. Two girls previously diagnosed as having Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), took Ritalin at home and at school daily. Three boys, previously diagnosed as having speech disorders, attended twice weekly speech classes. One of the girls diagnosed as ADHD was also learning disabled (LD) and attended the LD class for thirty minutes daily. Twelve students received daily Chapter I reading services, while only eight received daily Chapter I math services.

Transportation was another area of variability for this class. Eleven students traveled to school by bus, while five rode in cars, and none walked to school.

There were two additional students, one boy and one girl, both Euro-American, who were mainstreamed into this class daily from the EMR class for the first thirty minutes of school each morning and for lunch period. They were in this class only long enough each day to write in their journals and to listen to stories read daily to the class after lunch; however, we tried to include them as we enjoyed reading and writing and as a part of our community.

Absenteeism was not a problem with this class. In fact, the only child (one of the special education students mainstreamed into the class) who was absent for a significant number of days (17) had legitimate health problems. These students appeared to enjoy school and seemed to want to be a part of it every day. Three students were awarded perfect attendance certificates at the end of the year; five received good attendance certificates, indicating that they were absent three days or less.

The Instructional Assistants

Three Chapter I Instructional Assistants were assigned to this class. The first assistant, Karen, a motherly Caucasian woman in her late thirties with a comforting presence, was assigned to work with students in reading for one hour each day. She was a very competent, capable individual, self-motivated and extremely caring, who coordinated her efforts with those of the teacher. She was personally very organized, liked structure, and was comfortable in the classroom due to many years of experience there working with children. She was warm, empathetic, and positive with her students, who related well to her.

The second assistant, Sarah, a smiling, attractive Caucasian woman in her early thirties, assigned to this class for thirty minutes per day in math, used some of her lunch and planning time to listen to children read. She positively bubbled with enthusiasm and enjoyed the children and their efforts. She was invariably open, warm, empathetic, supportive, and eager for the children to share with her their efforts. She genuinely loved the children, bringing a bright, happy feeling to the classroom every day. The children clamored for her attention.

The third assistant, Janice, director of one of the computer labs for older children, was a pretty, stylishly-dressed young African American woman in her late twenties who came to our classroom twice-weekly for hour-long sessions in reading.

I usually asked her to hold individual conferences with students on their self-selected readings. She listened with care as the children conferenced with her, showing them smiling encouragement. She was very positive with her students, evidencing good rapport with them.

The Teacher / Researcher

I was the teacher, doing research in my own classroom. I am a middle-class, 48-year-old Caucasian female, divorced, with two teenage daughters. I was born in another state, but raised in the town in which I am now teaching. I attended the rival city high school in our community. I attended Huntingdon college in Montgomery, Alabama, and received my B.S. degree in Elementary Education from the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, in January, 1969. I received my M.A. degree from the University of Alabama at Birmingham, and am now completing my Ed.S. degree at UAB, as well. I have taught first, second, and third grades for a combination of twenty-three years of experience in a variety of schools and school systems.

One of my main loves in life is children, while another is reading; understandably, I find special joy in helping children learn to love reading. Because of personally discovering the peace that self-acceptance brings, I feel compelled to try to help my students find that acceptance of themselves, as well – just as they are. I think self-valuing is a powerful force in the lives of every individual.

I believe that what I do in the classroom is important and is making a difference in the lives of children. Since I have been exploring new ways of supporting literacy learning in the classroom, I have found excitement and joy in the classroom that was lost for many years. I would like to find ways to share these feelings with others in my profession as well as with the students I teach.

CHAPTER 3

PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION AND THE LITERACY ENVIRONMENT

Introduction

It is apparent from several researchers (Duckworth, 1987; Fosnot, 1989; Pierce, 1990) that what teachers believe personally about teaching and learning is influenced by how they learn from their own experiences as well as how they perceive teaching. Those beliefs will be reflected in what they teach and how they teach it.

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss this teacher/researcher's philosophy as it relates to education and the learning process, her understanding of her students, and her philosophy concerning language literacy learning and a language literacy environment.

A Philosophy of Education and the Learning Process

As the teacher/researcher, I know my beliefs impact my classroom in many ways; therefore, I feel a need to articulate those beliefs for the reader. I feel less threatened by expressing a philosophy of my own after reading Luijpen's (1969) statements: "Authentic philosophy is an attempt to give a personal answer to personal questions" (p. 19) and "Philosophy is authentic philosophy only when man *himself* philosophizes, when he *himself* raises questions and he *himself* tries to answer, when he *himself* endeavors to clear away the obstacles to insight" (p. 20).

I support Aldridge's (1991) assessment of the organismic paradigm on the nature of learning: "Learning is interactive . . . nativistic . . . meaningful . . . not necessarily observable . . . qualitative . . . dependent on prior knowledge . . . intrinsic . . .a process . . . developmental . . . whole (Gestalt)[4] . . . individual" (p. 11). I also feel there must be a constructivist slant to my personal classroom practice.

I believe that learning is a process of knowing. I agree with Duckworth's (1987) assertion that ". . . being willing to accept children's ideas . . . [and] . . . providing a setting that suggests wonderful ideas to children . . ." (p. 7) are ideal ways for schools and teachers to facilitate children's inventiveness. Duckworth's notions ". . . that the development of intelligence is a matter of having wonderful ideas and feeling confident enough to try them out, and that schools can have an effect on the continuing development of wonderful ideas" (p. 10) are having a profound effect on my classroom practice.

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[4] Gestalt refers to the whole group of experiences in which the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

As I move toward a more constructivist perspective, I find my own beliefs expanded through ideas gleaned from researchers who value the construction of knowledge from within and the assimilation of new experiences through prior knowledge (Duckworth, 1987; Fosnot, 1989; Kamii, 1989; Piaget, 1955).

As I listened in April to Sinclair[5] elucidate similarities and differences between Piaget and Vygotsky with regard to collaboration, argumentation, and coherent reasoning, I found myself in "disequilibrium" as I struggled to understand how the two theories are complementary. Sinclair's statement that Piaget viewed knowledge as being objectified through discussion/arguments/collaborative dialogues amongst equals made sense to me, as did her explanation of Vygotsky's view of knowledge as coming from interaction between novice and expert with emphasis on instruction. Her presentation stirred up questions in my mind, causing me to investigate both theorists further through more reading and reflection. I am still trying to "come to know" more about their ideas.

I do think there are some aspects of teaching which are crucial to making meaningful change in our school and in our students lives: being open to the unexpected; valuing and accepting people just as they are; fostering autonomy, thus allowing others to empower themselves; building a supportive community within the classroom and the school; teaching from a holistic process approach; stressing cooperation and collaboration while de-emphasizing competition; and experiencing and expressing delight in others and their efforts.

Fosnot (1989) expresses clearly the need for learners ". . . to be *empowered* to think and to learn for themselves. Thus learning needs to be conceived of as something a learner does, not something that is done *to* a learner" (p. 5).

We, as teachers, should be striving to produce lifelong learners--people, as Gross (1977) explains it, who are ". . . open to new experiences, ideas, information, and insights . . ." (p. 15) and who engage in ". . . self-directed growth" (p. 16).

Peterson (1992) states succinctly my beliefs about ways teachers must ". . . change their ways of thinking about learning and a broad range of practices . . . toward a more holistic perspective" (pp. 5,6). He stresses the key word *toward*. The holistic perspective is summarized through components listed on his chart as follows:

> *[Teachers] . . . help students grow in complicated and critical ways . . .*
>
> *People construct meaning by bringing meaning to and taking meaning*

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[5]Hermina Sinclair, world-renowned researcher, disciple of Piaget, and authority on Vygotsky, gave a presentation on April 5, 1994, at the University of Alabama at Birmingham entitled, "Piaget and Vygotsky on Collaboration, Argumentation, and Coherent Reasoning."

> *from their experiences . . . Knowledge is personal–people search for meaning, structure, order . . . Skills [are] learned while engaged in authentic expression that requires meaning to be negotiated, expressed, and developed . . . Curriculum is negotiated; [it is] connected to students' lives and supports students taking a critical stance . . . Connectedness is a principle; what makes sense to the students is built upon in order to further understanding . . . Approximation is an accepted principle . . . Intuition, feeling, and conceptual knowledge are valued ways of knowing . . . Collaboration is essential as teacher and student construct a learning community together . . . Students are empowered and responsible for themselves and to the group . . . Schooling emphasizes the importance of a meaningful present . . . Social, emotional, and cognitive [interests] are important . . . Collaboration and negotiation of meaning are emphasized [as students "work"] . . . [The] student is held accountable for [his] own learning . . . Students participate in planning and evaluation . . . Competence [is] judged by demonstrated ability to express meaning, solve problems, work with others, make perceptive critiques . . . Teacher and students seek out continuity within the life of the group and individual students' lives* (pp. 6-8).

It has been a long process for me to change my formerly held beliefs about best ways of working with children. I have had to break with tradition myself and to request special permission to incorporate different ways of exploring learning with my students. Thanks to supportive administrators who have been willing to allow my students and me to be inventive in our approaches to all aspects of literacy and our learning environment, my own beliefs have been strengthened and new avenues have been opened for my students.

A Philosophy Concerning the Students

I have attempted in Chapter 2, The Ethnographic Context, in the section "*The Students*" to describe the general characteristics of the class of students who were involved in this project. Generally, many of the students in this class would be referred to as "at risk" by various educational authorities, though I prefer not to think of them by that term. Unfortunately, as the years have gone by, I have seen more and more students with unfortunate statistics whose circumstances are apparently "stacked against" them. I am finding that in my school, this class is relatively "*normal*." I think the key for working with these students is the same as it

would be for working with any other students: love them; look for the good in them; accept them just as they are; encourage them to give their best; and appreciate their approximations toward their goals.

Trying to see my students as individuals, unique and important in their own right, I strive to give them more than just academic knowledge. I try to look beyond smudged faces or mismatched clothes to the person inside. Because I simply do not focus on surface appearances, it is rare that I can ever describe what a child has on unless I am determined to include it in my fieldnotes. I *know* my students and love them as individuals in their own right. I have high expectations for my students and value each effort they make on their way toward "*knowing.*" It is this valuing of *approximations* which has changed the tone of my classroom the most. I found myself and the students genuinely enthusiastic and excited for each student as he/she accomplished some small feat.

As Mayeroff (1972) says:

> *Perhaps few things are more encouraging to another than to realize that his growth evokes admiration, a spontaneous delight or joy, in the one who cares for him. He experiences my admiration as assuring him that he is not alone and that I am really for him. His awareness of my delight in his efforts to grow has a way of recalling him to himself: I help him realize and appreciate what he has done. It is as if I said to him, "Look at yourself now, see what you did, see what you can do"* (p. 44).

Mayeroff has much to say in his book, On Caring, (1972). My own beliefs about caring for others, in this instance, my students, coincide with his attitudes and advice:

> *To care for another person, I must be able to understand him and his world as if I were inside it. I must be able to see, as it were, with his eyes what his world is like to him and how he sees himself. Instead of merely looking at him in a detached way from outside, as if he were a specimen, I must be able to be with him in his world, "going" into his world in order to sense from "inside" what life is like for him, what he is striving to be, and what he requires to grow. But only because I understand and respond to my own needs to grow can I understand his striving to grow; I can understand in another only what I can understand in myself* (p. 42).

Fosnot (1989) reminds us: "Of utmost importance to good teaching is the ability to probe the understanding of the learner; to be aware of developmental issues; in a sense, to be skilled in the art of 'getting inside the student's head'." (pp. 2,3).

Other qualitative researchers such as Spradley (1980) also urge us to go "*inside*" the learner to understand that person's world from an *insider's* viewpoint. He urges us to learn from people. I also think it is imperative that teachers learn from people--*from their students!* If we have open minds and are alert to the possibilities, we will learn many things from our students; it is this understanding which we gain from them which enriches our lives and makes each new day exciting and filled with possibilities.

The importance of allowing student *choices* --choices in as many ways as possible--is explored in Chapter 6. Chapter 7 discusses the fostering of enjoyment, enthusiasm, and pride, recognizing the importance of each for students, as well as teachers.

Another aspect of my philosophy concerning students is that each child must feel personally successful. By building community in the classroom, we teachers have an outstanding opportunity to encourage feelings of personal and group success. We can de-emphasize competition and encourage cooperation and collaboration. By accepting each student *as he/she is*, we unlock a realm of opportunities for success in the classroom. Our very willingness to be accepting without displaying a negative devaluing of efforts builds a risk-free environment in which students can thrive and grow.

Maslow, in his preface to Motivation and Personality (1970), tells the reader:

> *I think that great social and educational changes could occur almost immediately if, for instance, we could teach our young people to give up their unreal perfectionism, their demands for perfect human beings, a perfect society, perfect teachers, perfect parents . . . perfect friends . . . etc., none of which exist and simply cannot exist--that is, except for transient moments of peak-experience . . ."* (p. xxii).

Just think, if we teachers could give up our demand for perfection from our students, and they, in turn, could give up their demands for perfection from us, how much more we might accomplish in the short span of time we are entrusted with their care!

A Philosophy Concerning Literacy Learning and A Literacy Environment

I am an enthusiastic believer in the process approach to literacy learning. I believe that reading is making meaning from print and that once a child has a good processing system in place, he/she is well on the way to self-improving behaviors every time he or she reads. Clay (1991) puts it succinctly when she explains, "The teacher aims to produce in the pupil a set of behaviours which will ensure a self-improving system. With a self-improving set of behaviours the more the reader reads the better he gets, and the more unnecessary the teacher becomes" (p. 10).

I have explored many teaching techniques and methods during my years of teaching reading and writing. I find that I have come to agree with Clay's caution to teachers against matching teaching methods to strengths of groups of children. She tells us, "Such matching attempts are simplistic, for English is a complex linguistic system. The way to use a child's strengths and improve his weakness is not to work on one or the other but to design the tasks so that he practises [sic] the weakness with the aid of his strong ability" (p. 13).

I agree with other researchers (Calkins, 1986; Clay, 1991; Goodman, Watson, & Burke, 1987; Graves, 1983; and Manning & Manning, 1989) that holistic literacy processes are the most beneficial way to help students construct meaning from print, and I invariably return to Cambourne's "Conditions of Learning" for support:

> *Learners need to be immersed in text of all kinds. Learners need to receive many demonstrations of how texts are constructed and used. Expectations of those to whom learners are bonded are powerful coercers of behaviour. "We achieve what we expect to achieve; we fail if we expect to fail, we are more likely to engage with demonstrations of those whom we regard as significant and who hold high expectations for us." Learners need to make their own decisions about when, how, and what "bits" to learn in any learning task. Learners who lose the ability to make decisions are "depowered." Learners need time and opportunity to use, employ, practice their developing control in functional, realistic, non-artificial ways. Learners must be free to approximate the desired model–"mistakes" are essential for learning to occur. Learners must receive "feedback" from exchanges with more knowledgeable "others." Response must be relevant, appropriate, timely, readily available, non-threatening, with no strings attached. Immersion and demonstration must be accompanied by engagement .*
>
> (Brown & Cambourne, 1991, p. 26).

If all of Cambourne's conditions are met in a literacy environment, literacy should abound! Throughout this project these conditions were in place as consistently as possible. I believe that this very consistency is essential for optimum growth to occur in the classroom.

My goal in designing a literacy learning environment is to provide children with opportunity after opportunity to love reading and writing. I immerse my classroom in print. I make available many, many books in a great variety, being careful to include both a constantly changing element of literature to ensure excitement and a steadily constant core of literature to encourage reflection and re-enjoyment of favorites. I try to involve children with books and with writing in as many ways as I can. I read to children at every opportunity and have them read to me, or to anyone else who will listen, every minute we possibly can. I have them write regularly in as many formats and for as many purposes as possible. Allowing children to connect with books by becoming authors themselves unlocks a whole new perspective for many who have never thought about books or other writings as being the way someone is sharing their thoughts with them. I think sharing the warmth, humor, comfort, and excitement of books is one of the greatest gifts we can give our students!

CHAPTER 4

IMPORTANCE OF BUILDING COMMUNITY IN THE CLASSROOM

Introduction

The idea of building community in the classroom intrigued me because of several personally meaningful experiences I had as part of various supportive, caring communities for more than two years as I worked through personal issues. Culminating these experiences was a weekend retreat for widowed and divorced persons in which I was finally able to come to terms with my own issues and to detach from the issues of others in my life. This retreat coincided with the assignment of a graduate project for which I decided to research and implement the building of community in my classroom. I read Peterson's (1992), Life in a Crowded Place, which recaptured moments from my own retreat and allowed me to see why and how retreat facilitators orchestrated some of my most meaningful experiences.

As I read and re-read Peterson's book, determined to implement many of his ideas in my classroom, I felt as if I had been empowered through experiencing community and wanted to see just how empowered my students could become through use of the same techniques. As it turned out, becoming a community in our classroom was probably the single-most important factor in the success we enjoyed together.[6] Many of ideas gained from Peterson were not new. As he says in his book:

> Although the concept of community in the classroom is not new, what is new is insight into why it is so important. We know now that the way human beings learn has nothing to do with being kept quiet. It has to do with our desire to make sense of our experience, to join with others, to become a part of a community. It has to do with developing our expressive abilities and participating in everything that interests us, with being able to benefit from the insight and experience of others as we work at making the world take on meaning for ourselves, with living and learning in a place outfitted with opportunities to learn, a place where we can fumble and make mistakes without being scorned or laughed at. And it has to do with being responsible for our own learning. In short, it has to mean something to us. And it won't unless we ourselves make it mean something. We need to learn how to talk about that meaning to truly understand our thinking. We need to listen to how others interpret our meaning in order to deepen our own understanding (pp. 2,3).

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[6] The remainder of this lengthy chapter gives specific citings of instances which I (in the role of teacher/researcher) regard as building blocks in the establishing of community in this classroom. Obviously, most of the *initial* stages of community building occurred early in the year, thus most fieldnote entries cited here are dated in October and November of 1993.

Supportive Acceptance

From the beginning of the year I had tried to be accepting and supportive of my students with their many differences, actively encouraging the acceptance of approximations. I had tried to develop a risk-free environment, making it clear that I would tolerate no "put-downs" or teasing of class members or of their efforts. Although this worked well, as far as it went, I now felt the need to expand this concept so that it not only eliminated negative responses to people and situations but also actively attempted to seek out positive responses.

I found that my own attitude of acceptance and valuing of effort was of much more importance than I realized. It was contagious!

In an interview with my principal in June, 1994, she commented that she felt that the changes I had been through personally had greatly influenced my teaching. She said that now I never apologized for messiness in the room when we were creating, that I was as eager as the children to share what we were doing, that it was obvious that I valued the efforts of the students, and that they did also. She said that she noticed enthusiasm and pride in each of us in our classroom. She said it excited her each time she visited us.

A Caring Place

It was following my reading of Peterson's (1992) book in which he said, "Teachers face the challenge of creating a place where students feel they belong and where they want to be" (p. 15) that I decided to assess the attitudes of the children toward school in general and toward our classroom in particular.

I recalled the technique used by retreat facilitators in which they briefly shared their personal thoughts and struggles, then dismissed us with a related question to which we were to respond by writing in a personal journal. We were encouraged to find a comfortable spot by ourselves in which we could concentrate and respond within an allotted amount of time. Those responses were then shared (or not shared) within small response groups. This concept of sharing, questioning, written response, and shared response was one I used over and over in my classroom as the year progressed. I found the students very receptive to this way of working, most of them delighting in sharing what they had written. Some were not comfortable reading their own responses at first and would ask me to share what they had written. I encouraged those to stand beside me as I shared what they had written, to "help" me when I couldn't translate a word, and to verbally add to their

written comments if they wished. Gradually, over the course of the year, all students felt free enough to share their thoughts without fear of being teased. Usually there was a clamoring to affirm the one sharing and what was being shared. Often, the comments being shared sparked new bursts of written response by others as they listened.

In one particular mini-lesson I called the children to our normal gathering place in the floor. I asked them to think about our classroom and whether or not they felt they belonged here. I read the following selection to them. After a brief discussion, I handed them copies of the page. I asked them to find a good writing spot and write their answers without discussing them with anyone. I told them they could share their answers if they wanted to when everyone had finished writing but that they did not *have* to share their answers unless they wanted to.

Following the copy of my question sheet are some responses with translations as necessary.

IS OUR CLASSROOM A CARING PLACE?

I think our classroom is a caring place. I think all of us are special people who really like each other and who take care of each other. What do you think?

I want you to feel that you belong in our classroom. I want you to like it here. I do feel that I belong because each of you gives me smiles and hugs and asks me what I think about things. And when I tell you what I think, you really listen. Do you feel that you belong here? Why or why not?

I like it here because everyone works together and helps each other out. I like the way no one makes fun of anyone else. I like the way we are proud of each other when someone does something well. I like the way we all try hard to do our best. I like the way we laugh and share and smile and hug! I like the way you don't wait for me to tell you everything to do... the way you see what needs to be done and just do it because it helps us all. I like your kindness. I like your smartness! I like YOU!

Do you like it here in our classroom? Why or why not? What do you like most about it? What would you change?

Exact transcripts of student comments, covering a range of positive ideas, are omitted for the sake of space; however, a few translations are included on the following page.

John: "I would not change anything because I like it the way it is."

Tina: "I think we do care for each other. I think I belong here because everyone treats me like I should be here. Yes, I like our room because everyone is working very hard. Nothing should change because I like it the way it is."

Beth: "I think so, too. When I have a problem, you'll help me. Yes, no one makes fun of me... I would not change anything."

Robert: "Yes, I do because I [think] that I belong in here because my friends help me. [I think] that Mrs. Cherry helps me. Everyone helps me."

Mark: "I think I belong here 'cause I have a nice teacher. I like it because I have friends. They help me when I have trouble."

Bob: "Yes, I think [I] belong because I like people help[ing] me and you help[ing] me."

Cathy: "Yes, because everyone cares about each other, and I like that. I would change my attitude. I would [be] nice."

Alan: "I think I belong here because I can learn a lot of things, and you are a nice teacher. The other kids in the classroom are good friends because they are fair about everything."

School Climate Survey

Teachers in grades one through three of my school were asked to administer a climate survey to their students as part of a pilot program for the performance based accreditation standards for the State Department of Education.

I was very much interested in seeing the questions on this survey, since many of them referred to things I have been consciously striving to incorporate into my classroom, particularly in building community in the classroom. From the questionnaire it becomes apparent that the students did feel the school climate was positive. Included on the following page are item-by-item totals of student responses.

Questionnaire Tally Totals	Yes	No
1. Do you feel safe at school?	14	0
2. Is your school clean?[7]	9	5
3. Do you like coming to school each day?	13	1
4. Do you sometimes get to choose what you like to do at school?	14	0
5. Does your teacher help you when you need help?	14	0
6. Do you feel you can tell your teacher your ideas?	12	2
7. Do you get to use your ideas to solve problems at school?	12	2
8. Do you take good care of materials (books, games, furniture) in your classroom?	14	0
9. Are your proud of your school?	13	1
10. Did you help make classroom rules?	11	3
11. Do you know why it is important to follow these rules?	13	1
12. Do you get to see your work hanging up in the classroom (hallways)?	14	0

It appears that all students felt safe, felt free to tell ideas to the teacher, realized that they were allowed choices, felt responsible for materials and resources used in the classroom, and were aware of the displaying of their work. One student felt more negative than the others, marking "no" on items 2, 3, 6,7,9, 10, and 11. As the questionnaires were anonymous, I was unable to determine whether or not that student had valid reasons for the responses, was in a "bad mood," or had some other reason for the negative responses. It was easy to determine that the students did not think our school was clean because at that time we still had debris from the fire which destroyed much of our school; when I asked them about that particular item, the students confirmed my thoughts. Items 6 and 7 had one additional negative response each, causing me to concentrate on strengthening those areas in our classroom. Item 10 had two additional negative responses. Because I know that the students *did* help make the rules as a whole class, I must infer that those marking item 10 negatively must not have felt that they *personally* had input into the making of rules-- perhaps they were overlooked as suggestions were made, or perhaps they had no suggestions to make. At any rate, the tone of the questionnaire was positive, substantiating my opinion that the children felt that school was a good place to be.

[7] A large portion of our school burned in March of 1993. A clean-up effort is underway but was not completed at the time of this survey, possibly accounting for the negative student responses on this item.

Accidental Success

One of the most successful things our class did toward building community came about quite by accident as I was having the children write thank-you letters to all persons who visited us to talk with us about their jobs/careers. I had intended this to integrate social studies concepts and literacy experiences, as well as to serve as an authentic letter-writing experience so that the children would gain some proficiency in writing friendly letters, one of the state-mandated language arts competencies. To my surprise, not only did the students learn to write letters and learn the format in a real context, they also began to look for things for which to thank people in every situation. They began to focus on the positive things others can bring to us and the good points of all of us in the classroom. This made an invaluable contribution to the sense of community which prevailed in this room.

Our first real letter-writing experience came following a forty-minute lunchroom tour and commentary given by our lunchroom supervisor. The children wrote enthusiastic thank-you letters to her when we returned to the classroom. I didn't have the heart to quench this enthusiasm by insisting on their editing and recopying the letters. Copies of some of these first letters are included in Appendix D.

The next time I observed community in the classroom occurred when one of the EMR students who was mainstreamed into my class daily had to be hospitalized for an illness. The students spontaneously wrote get-well letters to him. They were anxious to get the letters to him as soon as possible so that he would know that they were thinking of him.

The class wrote many, many more letters as various people came to speak to us or helped us in some other way. This recognition of services rendered undoubtedly gave importance to *helping* in the eyes of the students as well as practice in expressing appreciation, as the letter from Don in Appendix D shows.

Community Effort Persists... Even When the Community is Physically Apart!

Our sense of community was so strong that the children really tried to do what was expected of them, even in unusual circumstances.

The day before I was scheduled to be at Jacksonville State University for a writing conference using photography, I told the students about the conference, explaining that our classroom would be given a Polaroid camera and other items, and that they would have a substitute. The students assured me that they would do what they were supposed to do and seemed very excited about what we would receive. After

the students had left for the day, I was told that plans for my substitute had fallen through and that I would need to split my class, so I had to hastily change my plans for my students' work to ones they could do more independently. I wrote a letter on my computer at home that night, personalizing each copy. Following is a copy of one of the letters:

801 Main Street
Meadow, AL 35000
October 22, 1993

Dear Beth,

I am leaving a lot of work for you to do. You can do the work in any order you want to. If Mrs. Moore wants you to do something else, please do what she asks you to do. Don't worry if you don't finish my work, but do as much as you can. Just be sure to check off what you finish. Do not check off what you don't get done. Take whatever you don't finish for homework if you want to. Turn in this work to me on Monday.

I can't wait to see everything we'll get for our classroom. We'll start using the new things on Monday, so be sure you are at school!

Please be very sweet for Mrs. Moore. She is really nice to let you stay with her today. You might want to write her a thank you letter.

Have a good day. I miss you.

Love,

Mrs. Cherry

Attached to the letter was a listing of *many* assignments, varying in difficulty. I really did not expect my students to complete *all* of the assignments, many of which were lengthy writing projects, but I wanted them to have assignments to supplement whatever else they would be given in case they had extra time. Also, I was interested to see if by giving the students choice in what they could do and the order of doing it, they might do more than if I left mandated work.

Eleven out of the fourteen students in the class at that point in the year did <u>all</u> of the assignments! The other three did most of them. All of the children behaved extremely well, according to the teachers in whose classes they stayed... and <u>all</u> wrote thank you letters to "their" teachers. Only one teacher shared those letters with me. The letters, written by Don and Beth, are included in Appendix D.

Our Camera: A Turning Point in Our Community

On the following Monday, I shared the camera with the students, who were extremely excited about it. On the first day I took all of the pictures myself, showing the students how to use the camera and how to take care of it. Most of the pictures were showing students in various settings as they worked on some aspect of reading or writing. I asked the students to write letters to the principal to thank her for letting me go to the workshop. Amazingly, almost all of the students used correct friendly letter form, though their spelling, as usual, was far from conventional. These translated excerpts give an idea of their appreciation, even though some have misconceptions about the actual trip:

Tina Thank you for letting Miss Cherry go to the workshop to get that Polaroid camera. We enjoy it in our class. She made a lot of pretty pictures this morning.

Tom Thank you for letting Mrs. Cherry go to Jacksonville State.

Don Thank you for letting us go to the workshop. We got a lot of nice stuff. We got a camera, and some film, and some activity books.

Mark We're glad that we have a camera. It is a good camera.

Beth We enjoy the camera so far. And thank you for letting Mrs. Cherry go. I hope we can take a picture of you. Mrs. Cherry takes pictures of us.

Cathy Thank you for taking Mrs. Cherry to the workshop. I know that she had fun at the work shop. Oh, thank you for the camera.

Alan Thank you for letting Mrs. Cherry use the camera. We have taken 14 pictures. Mrs. Cherry said when we learn to use the camera [we will get to take pictures].

In the picture that the children wanted me to take to accompany their letters, most children had their arms draped around each other. That was not staged, they just started doing it as they moved closer for the picture. This was another clue as I looked for ways they demonstrated feelings of community.

As the students began taking pictures themselves, they became more aware of instances which occurred during our day in which someone was doing something to

celebrate. Looking through the lens of the camera seemed to intensify students' awareness of what was important in making our classroom a good place to live.

Special Day Celebrations

One of the points made by Peterson (1992) in his book, Life in a Crowded Place, is that we need to take time for celebrations. He says:

> Celebrations require planning and preparation... The preparation nurtures anticipation and brings everyone together... There is joyful affirmation of life... People can experience one another in fresh and imaginative ways not anticipated... It is by giving yourself unselfconsciously to the moment that the worth of a celebration can be experienced (p. 41).

We celebrated special days throughout the year in our classroom, bringing about a feeling of closeness and group anticipation. The first time we began building excitement for such a celebration was in the middle of October when I asked the children to write about what they were going to do on Halloween night. The children were very enthusiastic about the writing assignment. I told them they did not have to edit their writings, just share them with me. Two of my very favorites are included in Appendix D. The reason these two were so special to me was that it was the first time either of those students wrote entries of any length or showed this degree of enthusiasm through their writings. Alan's spelling was at an emergent stage, but his thoughts made sense and his words conveyed a story.

As Jane usually wrote only "I love you" poems or "Roses are red" poems (with an unusual twist at the end), I was greatly surprised at the length of her written response and at the sense of story she conveyed through her words. Her writing was very difficult to read, her words were crowded, her spelling was less than conventional, and her punctuation was non-existent; but I *loved* this story because it rang with truth and sounded, for the first time, the way she *talked*.

Continuing to Build Toward a Special Day Celebration

As Halloween drew closer, I began to read stories to the class. They especially enjoyed the reading of "Spooky Stories," a collection of student-written stories from my second-grade class in 1977. The people who wrote the stories were twenty-three and twenty-four years old at the time I read the stories to my class. Several of those people still live in our community and were known by my current students, who

were amazed to hear what those "grown-up" people wrote when they were in my class in second grade!

I also shared a book written by my second-graders who were at this time in the fifth grade, many of whom were "our" fifth-graders who came to our class every afternoon to hear my students read. My children were very excited to read what someone they knew well had written.

I had thought that the fifth-graders might feel a little intimidated by my sharing of their book, thinking that they might possibly tease each other. What I was not expecting was that they would argue over whose turn it was to check out the book to take it home! Most of my fifth-graders and many of my second-graders checked out that book for at least one night, some for several nights!

Following the sharing of these two particular student-written books, my children began to clamor to write their own class book. They wanted me to type it and run off copies for them, as I had done the earlier books. I originally planned to do just that, but because of lack of typing time, I was unable to do so. On the morning of October 29, I told the children that they would just have to edit and rewrite their own stories if we were to have them to take home that day. Without complaint they jumped into the effort and created a delightful book of "spooky" Halloween stories. Luckily, I had a classroom volunteer that day who was able to run off the copies for us. (In a later book, the children remembered to mention her contribution to this effort in a celebration of thanks to people who had helped us this year.)

Each child created her/his own cover for the book, enjoying the task. The children sent a copy of their book to our principal so she could enjoy our special day celebration, too.

This was a most popular book. The children took turns reading their own story or someone else's story to each other and to me for days afterward! This was another instance of valuing each other and our efforts.

"Ceremony": Providing Focus

"Ceremony provides time and a suitable climate for students to focus on learning and community life" (Peterson, 1992, p. 19).

As I gathered the students into our usual place on the floor for mini-lessons, I told them we were going to talk about the things we had learned about writing since school started. I told them that I had made a list of things I thought we had learned and that I would share that list with them later. I then asked them if they thought

that they knew much about writing. The overwhelming response was, "No." I said, "Well, let's just try to think of anything we know about writing, and I'll write it on a list so we can see what we do know." They agreed to try to think of some things they knew. As I called on them one by one, I listed their comments and put their names beside each comment.

The students were just as surprised as I to see what a long list of things they knew about writing. They were also curious as to what was on my list. We compared our lists. They were really proud of themselves for all that they had learned in such a short time since school started (though they had not incorporated all that they mentioned into their original writing at that point in time). The list was so long that when I taped it onto the wall, it was much taller than the children. The students asked to have a picture taken of two class members standing beside it as a comparison. (The picture is included in the class book, Celebrations.)

This episode pointed out to me the value of having students discuss as a group what they have learned. By collaborating on the list, students were able to come up with an impressive number of specific areas of writing that they knew about. This listing as a group was another strengthening of the bonding of a community of "smart people," as they had begun to think of themselves. We kept the list on the wall until January, enabling the students to refer to it and point out to visitors with pride their "list" about writing. It certainly changed their attitudes about themselves from thinking of themselves as people who didn't know to those who did. This growth in self-esteem was of great value throughout the year.

Choosing When to Celebrate

"Celebration is perhaps our finest way of caring for others. There is a selflessness that is expressed through celebration. The other person is the focus of our attention, and we are one with them as we celebrate" (Peterson, 1992, p. 45).

Our class decided that we had a lot to celebrate. In fact, we had enough to celebrate to write a book about it. We called our book Celebrations! It was a culminating experience to reflect the enjoyment of events and people we had celebrated thus far in the school year.

We began our book in late October, shortly after I had received the camera for the classroom. As we collected photographs and did writings to tell about them, we decided that we really needed to put them into book form to read and share. The book was in great demand in the classroom and for check-out all year.

If I were required to name one thing that most affected the community-building process in this classroom, I would have to name the creation of Celebrations! Focusing attention on the positive things which were occurring in the classroom and on the contributions of individuals definitely influenced the thinking of the students in the class -- and it influenced me, as well! Once the book was completed and was available to be read in the classroom, a sense of pride seemed to well in the students. When the students started taking the book home, I began hearing wonderful, supportive comments from parents, grandparents, neighbors, and friends as the students read and re-read the book to them. I did not view this project as a public relations tool, but actually, it turned out to be one. That book helped to explain to parents the ways we worked in our classroom, what we valued, and what we were capable of creating. I expect to have every class from now on create their own Celebrations! book early in the year in the hope that it will do for them what this book did for our class this year.

Conversation / Caring Talk / Talk Story

Peterson (1992) places high value on types of talk in Life in a Crowded Place:

> Talk is the primary medium for learning (p. 47).
>
> Caring talk is an indispensable part of life in the learning community... It is friendly in tone and signals acceptance and a willingness to belong... The expression of care strengthens all people involved and the community as a whole (pp. 47-48).
>
> We come to know the other person, child or adult, through the stories he or she shares with us. There is a coming together when people in a learning community intertwine the events happening in their lives through story (p. 49).

Following a Fire Prevention Week presentation by several firemen standing near the firetruck, I invited one fireman to come to our classroom to speak to our class if he could "squeeze" ten or fifteen minutes to do so. He came to us about an hour later and talked with the students at length.

He engaged the children in *caring talk* and began to *talk story* with

them as he shared his real experiences as a firefighter in our city.

When Fireman Camp finished speaking to our class, my students just rushed over to give him hugs. He did a quick step-back and looked a little nonplused. "What was *that* for?" he queried. The responses were: "because we love you;" "because you care about us and want to keep us safe;" "because you took your time to talk with us;" "because you love us;" and other comments in that vein. All of the comments by the children were completely spontaneous and unsolicited. He responded by returning the hugs and smiles. He even went out of his way to step across to several children who could not get close enough to reach him and to give them hugs also.

These students were very warm and giving and accepting. They seemed to include everyone who entered into any activity with us as a part of our community. They looked for the positive in everyone. (Excerpt from fieldnotes, 10/8/93).

Rites of Transition: Threshold Rites

> Rites carried out at the threshold are transition rites when the crossing brings the person into meaning of a different order... The importance of the rite is that it keeps the two worlds straight. Schools are not everyday in their approach to life... They have specialized functions to perform... Feeling comfortable and confident in a situation is a necessary condition for people to give their best (Peterson, 1992, pp. 29-30).

Before time for school to begin Tom and Robert came right in and swept and straightened without having been asked. Jessica and Cathy asked for permission to wash their hands and prepare and pass out the snacks. (I allowed the students to snack along with working if they wished.)

These are "threshold rites," one of the types of "transition rites" spoken of by Peterson. The students separate the world of school from the outside world as they cross the threshold by getting our day started "correctly." By pitching in to help prepare for each day's events as soon as they entered the classroom, the students helped themselves get ready to begin the special process of "school." (Excerpt from fieldnotes, 10/12/93).

Rites of Transition: Competency Rites

> Rites of competence are celebrations that intensify an event's significance or emphasizes its noteworthiness. . .This type of rite is important to both the individual and the group. It ensures that the . . . [group] . . . take[s] note and pay[s] attention to something that holds value. . . Community members to out of their way to acknowledge the new competence of a classmate (Peterson, 1992, pp. 30,32).

Don checked out of school early for a doctor's appointment. When his mother came in to get him, the students began spontaneously telling her all the great things he had done that day.

He had helped me solve a problem on the computer; he had written an outstanding story; he had helped Jane with some problems in her work; he had read with some third-grade students; he had drawn a really interesting picture; he had worked really hard to do his assignments completely and well.

The other students recognized these achievements and affirmed him to his mother through their insightful comments. There was no jealousy -- just affirmation and praise. (Excerpt from fieldnotes, 10/19/93).

Achievement Celebration

The following excerpt from my fieldnotes shows ways the capitalizing on student interest and enthusiasm can give importance to a situation in the eyes of students and appear to cause them to focus on perceived competencies of their peers.

Tom was fascinated by Where the Wild Things Are, by Maurice Sendak. He saw a video of the book in the library last Monday and checked out the book. Ever since that time, he has read that book constantly.

When Tom was able to read fluently and confidently to me, I asked him to read it to our Chapter I Resource Teacher. The other children applauded when he finished. He was so proud of himself that I sent him to read to two second-grade teachers, two third-grade teachers, and one fourth-grade teacher.

It was his birthday, and he wanted to visit his kindergarten teacher for a birthday hug and sticker. When he came back, he asked if he could read Where the Wild Things Are to her. After gaining my permission and reading

to her, he came back with a note asking if he could come back to her classroom to read to her students when they awoke from their naps. I sent him later with a student-photographer to read to her class. He was very proud of himself; the other students were proud of him, as well. The photographer, Alan, was so proud of Tom that he drew a picture of himself taking a picture of Tom with all of the kindergarten children sitting at their feet! (We put this picture in the class book, Celebrations! See Appendix E, p. 111.)
(Excerpt from fieldnotes, 10/26/93).

Fifth-Grade Partners Just Won't Quit

As I reviewed fieldnotes from early in the year and compared them with taped interviews from the end of the year, I found that a real bond had been forged between my students and their fifth-grade reading partners.

When the fifth-graders who are paired with my students as daily "reading partners" came into the class today, each immediately began listening to their younger "buddy" read. There is beginning to be a real sense of support among the fifth-graders for the second-graders. The older students are very proud of the number of books their young partners have read. One fifth-grader, Davis, often brings books he checks out for Robert, his young partner. The younger students genuinely look forward to the last twenty minutes of school each day. They can't wait to read to their older friends. I have had to cancel the partner readings two or three times since school started due to late assemblies, etc. The students, both younger and older, have shown great disappointment each time. This is such a positive experience for all the children that we try never to miss it.

I notice that the older students are beginning to walk with the younger ones to the cars and to the busses, rather than always walking just with their peers. This inclusion of the little ones is heartwarming to see!
(Excerpt from fieldnotes, 10/26/93).

I had asked the older students to record in reading diaries whatever selection their young partner read each day. The older students were very proud of the progress their partners made and bragged to each other about how well their students were doing and about how many books they had read. It was amazing to see how quickly the bonds began to form between the groups of students.

I interviewed most of the fifth-graders during the last two days of school (May 26 and 27, 1994) to find out if they felt the joint sessions in which fifth-graders listened to second-graders read should be continued or not. Unanimously they felt that the same program should be kept next year. They enjoyed working with the students, they said. They felt as if they were making a valuable contribution to the younger students and really liked their partners. They did not think swapping out fifth-graders every six-weeks would be a good idea. They thought I should keep everything just as it was this year with one fifth-grader partnered with one second-grader for the entire year. They mentioned liking to receive and give notes and little gifts throughout the year; it made them feel "special," they said.

Although the room was noisy when fifth-graders were listening to all the second-graders in my class read aloud at the same time, in the interviews none of the fifth-graders said that the noise bothered them or kept them from being able to concentrate on what their second-grader was reading. As the sole adult in the room, I probably was the only one disturbed by the noise, although teachers passing in the hall invariably commented that THAT would "drive them crazy" and that they were glad they were not the ones in the room with all of that oral reading going on at the same time. (They had a point!) Even with all of the noisiness and confusion at the end of the day as we tried to put up the books, reading diaries, beanbag, and pillows, re-arrange desks, and be ready to leave the room at the proper time, I wouldn't trade the last twenty minutes of the day for anything. This pairing of students became a very positive part of our day and went far in establishing that feeling of community across grade lines. (See p. 112, Appendix E.)

Incorporation Rites

> The strength of a learning community is the ability of the members to accept one another as they are and to help one another make changes they value... The persistent challenge for teachers is to create a place where members not only come together but also tolerate multiple perspectives... Caring is the thread used to weave cooperation, self-esteem, and growth of individuals and the group... Bringing about a sense of unity and belonging is never easy – it has to be worked at day in and day out (Peterson, 1992, p. 33).

The following excerpts from fieldnotes give examples of ways a sense of caring

was brought to our community:

> Today we had a new student enter our class. His name is Sam Martin. The other class members were very accepting and nurturing. They valued him immediately and embraced him into our community. As we were putting the finishing touches on our book, Celebrations!, they were most insistent that we include a page about him. They were very kind and caring in comments which they wrote to him and about him. It seemed to put him at ease right away. (Excerpts from fieldnotes, 11/9/93).

The immediate acceptance appeared to be very therapeutic for Sam, who had been mainstreamed out of an EMR class into a regular classroom setting just before transferring to our school. When he first joined our class, he often cried over assignments, particularly in math. At those times the other students surrounded him and taught him that mistakes were "okay" in our room. Thus, they pulled him out of his withdrawal into becoming a real member of our community. Sam changed from a timid child whose head drooped when he faced a challenge to one who, by the end of the year, had confidence in his ideas and was willing to stand up for his opinions.

> Another instance of community was revealed in early fieldnotes:
> Cathy just reached over and hugged Ralph at the animal show this afternoon. She said, "Isn't this fun?" She seems to feel close to everyone. I noticed many of the children looking at me and smiling or looking at each other and smiling every time the animal trainer brought out a new animal or made a revealing comment about them. The children seem to be drawn to communicate with each other, even without words. When they enjoy something, they appear to want to share that feeling! (Excerpt from fieldnotes, 11/10/93)

A Special Case

At the beginning of the year there was much tattling about Jane, who was diagnosed as ADHD and who took Ritalin twice daily. She was a child from a very different mold who began the year with loud singing, humming, and other noises -- all of the time. She slid out of her desk when required to sit in it, crawled under the tables, hung upside-down with her head and feet touching the floor and her middle across the seat of her desk, and generally created a disturbance the majority of the time. As she became used to being allowed freedom of movement and as she began

making her noises soft ones, she gained greater acceptance from class members.

In late fall she began to sit in her seat during the times we had large group lessons (though she did not pay attention very well or for very long at a time) and to keep her noises quiet ones. She began choosing her desk when reading self-selected materials, while others were reading on the beanbag or pillows. Obviously the desk itself was not her problem; rather it seemed it was being *required* at times to sit there that was unacceptable to her. Having choices seemed to have been a key for Jane.

Jane almost never showed any emotion, but at rare times she could get very excited. One such time occurred after she had completed required assignments and was working on a computer game in math. She had selected a difficult game and had taught herself how to manipulate the game successfully. She made 2,000 points one day in a short time period before I made her return to her seat to prepare for our next activity, which was attending an animal show in the high school gym. Jane was ecstatic! She grinned and hopped around exuberantly with pride of accomplishment. We all just stopped what we were doing to enjoy Jane's success! All of the other children were grinning also. I was myself! We spent only about five or six minutes in our celebration of Jane, but it was unbelievable to see what success did for her. She kept telling us over and over that she was going to tell her Aunt Tammy, her uncle, her great-grandmother, and ... [here she named many other individuals] ...that she made 2,000 points. Jane flitted from one person to another, telling them again and again. Spontaneous clapping broke out. I asked Jane to write about what she was feeling. Jane's enthusiasm, while not evident from her paper, is very evident from her photograph taken a full ten minutes after her writing. She was still smiling, a very rare occurrence indeed! (See Appendix D for Jane's writing and photo.)

> Some celebrations don't require advance planning and preparation. They just happen spontaneously... The reason for a spur-of-the-moment celebration is to release the spirited way celebrants give of themselves in response to the forces of nature (Peterson, 1992, p. 41).

A Final Thought

At one point during the year (when Mitchell transferred into our class) I had thought our strong community would be destroyed because he was so constantly disruptive and argumentative, but I was amazed to discover that after a few months, he was absorbed into it instead! (This is more fully explained on pp. 7-8, 68-69.) Our classroom had truly become *a caring place*.

CHAPTER 5
POWER OF THE PROCESS APPROACH TO LITERACY

Introduction

There is unbelievable power in the process approach to literacy! I have seen nothing which works so well to unleash creativity, confidence, and positive experiences. The process approach has revitalized my teaching and captivated my students. How can we feel other than good about a process which values our efforts on our way to success, which accepts approximations rather than demanding perfection, which allows us to explore our own creative thoughts and the creative efforts of others? Buros (1991) says that this approach is a "...natural process of teaching children to read, write, speak, and think -- by immersing them in meaningful, 'real life' experiences that lead to personal fulfillment" (p. 6).

Children want to learn and enjoy that learning. In this study I found the process approach to writing and reading to be a major factor in the success and enjoyment of my students. As I speak of the process approach, I mean integrating reading, writing, speaking, listening, and thinking throughout the day. I mean allowing choices in literature, in assignments, in learning styles, in styles and formats of writing, in grouping of students, and in a variety of other ways. I mean holding children responsible for their choices. I mean challenging students to stretch beyond what is "easy," to demand their best, yet to accept their efforts and to accept them as individuals. I think the environment should provide enough stress to challenge thinking, but not so much stress that it interferes with learning. I mean, above all, encouraging thinking, both deliberate and reflective. I mean allowing children to know that the process is as important as the product, but to teach them to give of their best in order to create a product of which they can take ownership and in which they can take pride.

Language Development as an Outgrowth of Thinking

Duckworth (1987) citing Sinclair, summarizes the conclusions drawn by Sinclair in her 1967 study on the relationships between language level and intellectual level as "... language development is *dependent* on the level of thinking rather than being responsible for the level of thinking" (p. 25). In her description of pedagogical implications of Sinclair's study, Duckworth points out that "[t]eaching linguistic formulas is not likely to lead to clear logical thinking; it is by thinking that people get better at thinking. If the logic is there, a person will be

able to find words adequate to represent it. If it is not there, having the words will not help" (p. 25).

It is this same premise which Mathis (1994) explores in her thought-provoking article, "If children learn how to think first, writing will follow." She says writing deficiencies are not really as much an issue of vocabulary, spelling, or grammar; "[r]ather, the missing link is the stuff called thinking. The slow, deliberate reflection; study and research; the entertainment of opposing views; the careful listening that creates impressions, which, by turns, form convictions, demand expression, propel writing" (p. A7).

Getting my students to really think is a challenge. I like to think of myself as a facilitator of thinking, a person who strives to be a questioner of children. I learned from my professors the challenge of responding to opposing positions on issues and felt as a student the frustration of groping to explain my position or sometimes realizing the error of my reasoning and having to rethink my opinion. I also felt the confident feeling when I had logically thought out my position and could defend it well. I endeavor to structure my classroom and lessons to allow my students to gain these same feelings with their own struggles as they "*come to know.*" The thinking process did not happen overnight in my classroom, but it *did* happen! It was one of the most exciting aspects of the entire study.

Acknowledging Different Perspectives

As Probst (1992) reminds us, we "...must pay... close attention to the readers' responses, thoughts, feelings, and memories, because without that close attention to self readers have no way of knowing where anything comes from" (p. 61). He urges us to pay attention to context of the selection as it shapes meaning and gives it significance. He points out that readers make sense of text in different ways and that by comparing and contrasting different ways readers relate to the same text, students are allowed quite different ways of perceiving the same piece of literature. Probst encourages us to help students view these different perspectives as indications of the "*uniqueness*" of each reader -- not as better or less worthy interpretations.

One of the most powerful things I noticed in our classroom was that over the course of the year, the students gained more respect for differing opinions. Cullinan (1993) reminds us that "[a]s society becomes more diverse, student populations become more diverse. A single point of view is simply no longer adequate" (p. 2). I was pleased as students grew in their ability to view other opinions as valid without

being judgmental as to "rightness" or "wrongness" of comments. I worked hard to promote the idea of our not always having to come to consensus on issues. Hopefully a student was able to defend his/her point of view, although many times students changed positions as they realized their reasoning was flawed or as someone convinced them to accept an alternative position. As the year began while most students were hesitant to express differing opinions, Don was articulate about the positions he took, thus encouraging others to take risks in expressing and defending their opinions also. There was much growth in this area over the year's span.

Good Literature Nourishes Reading

Good literature is the source of many positive aspects of classroom life, one of which is enhancing the community of readers. As Peterson states:

> *When students perform rituals such as moving to another place in the classroom and gathering in a circle for story time, what happens can be likened to the lowering of the house lights and raising of the curtain at a play; the audience is moved to give themselves to the imaginary world created through words* (Peterson, 1992, p. 25).

Not only is the act of coming together to hear literature important, the literature *itself* is important. Sloan (1984) expressed it as:

> *Children will become readers only if their emotions are stirred and their imaginations stretched by what they find on printed pages. One way -- a sure way -- to make this happen is through genuine literature... Nothing is more important or practical in the long run than genuine literature. Nothing should come before it, all efforts to teach reading must begin with it... Literature, because it is worth reading, nourishes the desire to read* (p. 5).

Throughout the year -- every day -- I read at least two good books to my students or one or two chapters when we were reading longer books. This sharing of books was a factor I regard as *most* important in fostering a love of reading. I can remember from my own days in elementary school, my *favorite* part of school was listening to Mrs. Street, my fourth-grade teacher, read books to us. Every day after lunch she read a chapter of an exciting book; when she finished one book, she began another. I can remember that my imagination was fired! I had already liked reading, but she opened new worlds to me and made me *love* it! I have always kept in mind what Mrs. Street did for me and have tried to pass on that love of literature to

students in my classes over the years.

Sharing books with children is only part of building enjoyment of reading in students. Another large part of this building process is having the children love to read for themselves. Although there are many things which contribute to this process, the literature itself is the most important.

> *Unless printed words make a strong appeal to their emotions and imaginations, children will remain indifferent to reading and writing them. For children, printed words must provide wonder, delight, interest, and pleasure, or they won't bother to read, even though they may have learned the rudiments of reading* (Sloan, 1984, p. 5).

Laughlin & Swisher (1990) stress that using literature in the reading program enables teachers " ... to promote a love of reading and allow students emotional connections with the characters and ideas in literature, to encourage deeper understanding and higher level thinking, and to use materials that hold significance for young readers" (p. x).

I was not the only one to share literature with the class. The students shared literature, also. When someone wanted to read a book to the class, we tried to find a time during the day to meet that request. Shared literature gave our class such a great opportunity to express delight! Not only did the students share what they loved about various pieces of literature, they enthusiastically interacted with others as they shared literature, too.

Reading -- Because We Want To

Sloan (1984) says:

> Literacy is a state of becoming, not a point to be reached... [and refers to a literate person as]... not those who know how to read, but those who read: independently, responsively, critically, and because they want to. The first real business of reading instruction is to make children want to read. To do that, we must be as concerned with *what* they read as with *how* they read (p. 4).

An incident occurred in my classroom the day we returned from our spring break which pointed out the attitudes of the students about reading and books. I had called the class to our normal seating place in the floor and was informally interviewing them about reading. This excerpt gives the flavor of our discussion. These students are *motivated* to read.

Teacher: ...Does anybody want to tell me something that they like about what we've done this morning? (Jane raises her hand to speak.) Jane, what do you like?

Jane: We've read.

Teacher: We've read. We certainly *have*!

Jessica: I know, Mrs. Cherry.

Jane: And it also makes our mind run.

Teacher: It surely does. (Jessica raises her hand.) Jessica?... [intervening comments occur.]

Jessica: ...And we read...

Teacher: Why do you think I chose to have you read so much today instead of write so much? (Mark raises his hand.) Mark?

Mark: It makes us smart.

Teacher: It surely does.

Cathy: It makes us read better.

Teacher: Cathy, say that again.

Cathy: Because we need to read, because... to get our minds moving real quick, 'cause we've been out a long time...

Teacher: OK! Did anybody do any reading when they were out? (Many hands are raised.) Let me see, let me call your name if you did reading when you were out... Alan... Connie... Bob... Jessica... Jane... Mark... Sam... and Mitchell... and Robert... and Tom... and Tina... all read something while we were out... OK...

Mitchell: All of us read something...

Teacher: No, there were a couple of people who didn't... but that's okay... It's just great that so many read! (Pause) How many of you really were excited when you saw the books that I brought in this morning? (Many raise hands.)

Mitchell: Yeah!

Teacher: Every single person... John, were you excited when you saw that I brought in library books this morning? (He nods.) OK... [intervening comments occur.] ...OK. I got several books you had read before because they were books I knew you had really enjoyed... and I thought you might enjoy reading them again.

Mitchell: Yes!

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Teacher: How many of you would like to read a book over that you've already read? One that you liked? (Every person raised their hands.) Every single person! How nice!

Cathy: Do you?

Teacher: Yes, I do. If I have a book, and it was really good the first time, sometimes I read it over again.

Jessica: If you don't know the words, then the second time you read it, you'll know the words!

Teacher: Right.

Cathy: Whenever we were out of school, the next day we went to the library and I brought five books.

Teacher: You got five books from the library?

Cathy: Yes.

Teacher: Did you read all five of them during spring break?

Cathy: Yes.

Teacher: Great!

Jane: I got five, too.

Teacher: Did anybody else go to the library? (A show of hands is immediate.) Let's see, Ralph, Robert, Tina, Mitchell, Sam, Mark, Bob, Alan, and Cathy all went to the library during spring break? (Children nod.)

Cathy: I saw Tina!

Teacher: Are you (looking around to the entire group) telling me the truth?

Robert: I am!

Teacher: That's great! That is really great! How many of you went upstairs to the room with the glass? [This is where children's books are kept.]

Cathy: I did! (There is a chorus of voices saying they did.)

Robert: I had fun upstairs!

Teacher: All right!

Robert: I just... My eyes went way out!... (Excerpt from interview 4/4/94)

As I work with students, I try to encourage them to use strategies "good" readers/writers use. All are based on the principle of having the selection "*make sense.*" One strategy that I feel is most important is predicting. Early & Ericson (1988) tell us, "Good readers use cues in the text and knowledge in their heads to make predictions" (p. 39). They further elaborate strategies as well as the need for having

them but caution us not to allow the strategies to get in the way of the story and remind us of the slogan all teachers of reading should remember when working with students: "The best way to learn to read is by reading" (p. 35).

Predictable Books -- Helping Us As We Began

One of the most exciting aspects of working with emergent readers was to watch them "read" predictable books and for the first time begin to think of themselves as readers.

> *Predictable books share several common features including rhythm, repetition of vocabulary and repetition of story structure. These books, read over and over, enable children to remember the text and thus they predict and "read" along with the teacher, with other children and by themselves... [Delyne, a kindergarten teacher, says] ..."I realized that predictable books had to have a rhythm to them and there had to be a kind of 'sing-song.' There had to be something to help children figure out what was coming next"... In other words, predictable books help children realize that much of what readers read is what they predict or expect to read* (Manning, Manning, & Long, 1989, p. 237).

It was interesting as the school year began to watch children "read" The Little Red Hen and Caps for Sale. These two predictable books were all time favorites for those students who were struggling to make sense of print at the start of the year. They "read" those books over and over, to themselves, to their friends, to me, to anyone who would listen. We (the students and I) were very proud of their efforts, and gradually they moved in a somewhat different direction -- to recorded books -- in addition to predictable books.

Recorded Books

Marie Carbo, in her work on reading styles (1991), introduced her readers to "recorded books." In a workshop sponsored by my school system, I learned to record books in the style Carbo recommends and recorded fifty-five trade books written by Margaret Hillert and ten books by other authors. The books were written primarily at various first-grade levels of difficulty. When school started I checked-out six tape

players with headsets so that my students would have the possibility of listening to recorded books at any time they desired. I allowed the students to check out the books, tapes, tape players, and headsets in order to "read" the books over and over at home. I thought the students would quickly be bored as they listened to the stories more than once; however, Carbo's theory is that once a student has read along with the tape and followed along with the words three times, she/he should be able to read the book independently to an adult. She stresses the need for an adult or other capable reader to take the time right then to listen to the child read that book. My students *loved* this way of reading. It was at this point that I enlisted the aid of virtually every person who walked through our door to listen to students read -- grandmothers, aunts, fathers, mothers, principals, other teachers, other students -- everyone we could persuade to listen! Even those students who were able to read independently seemed to enjoy the recorded books and the opportunity to read them to someone. Parents of several of my students made a point to tell me how much their child enjoyed reading along as he/she listened. Mark's mother said that she knew he learned best through listening, but that she did not realize how much that auditory approach enhanced his reading. She found at home, as I did in the classroom, that use of recorded books improved his confidence so that he was much more willing to attempt reading other types of books and to feel that he was *capable* of reading them. Virtually every student had "read" every recorded book, or most of them, by the end of the first three or four weeks of school. Most of the other types of books available in my classroom were too difficult at that point, so I checked out many books from the local library to supplement our classroom selection. Upon reflection, I would rate the use of recorded books with this particular class as one of the most effective motivators for reading that I used with them early on. I did find that as the students became more independent, they relied less and less on these books, until, at the end of the year, those books were never picked up. This appeared to be a crutch the students used only as long as they needed it. Bob's mother mentioned in an interview in May that she had noticed that he never needed to bring home the recorded books any longer, but that they had really helped him at the beginning of the year. Some few students used recorded books much longer than did the majority of the class, but there were never any "put-downs" or teasing of any students for selecting the recorded books. (I was a bit surprised by this until I realized that this was one of the effects of building community and that it had begun before I realized it.)

Becoming Authors Changes Perspectives

Sloan (1984) challenges teachers to make reading and writing crucial to children, saying, "Children develop their ability to read and write by reading and writing. But reading and writing require considerable effort, and children will not bother to expend it unless their experience convinces them that written words have significance in their lives" (p. 4). I feel that one of the easiest ways to convince them that written words *are* significant to them is to change the student from being just a "reader" of words to a "writer" of words. As Calkins (1986) tell us, "Human beings have a deep need to represent their experience through writing" (p. 3). Calkins goes so far as to title one of the chapters of her book, " *authorship: when children are insiders, they make connections,*" and further elaborates by saying, "[i]t is the experience of writing and of *having written* that has changed everything for me" (p. 219). As she continues this chapter, she tells the reader that she views authorship as a process which sheds insight on what she reads as it allows her to be an insider in reading with a different perception of herself. She says that her experience as a reader changed because she felt herself part of the inner circle of authors. She continues by speaking of this change of perspective as it relates to students: "Because... students perceive themselves as authors, they will make connections with the books they read" (p. 221).

I noticed in my class that not only *authorship* added to the reading process, but also *sharing* of their writings was extremely important. We used the concept of "the author's chair" as explained by Graves (Hansen & Graves, 1983) as a place of esteem when we were sharing our stories. Sharing their work was very important to these students. The students seemed to gain affirmation each time they shared their creations. I saw this affirmation occurring on two levels -- first, for the person who was sharing and second, for the work being shared. As Laughlin & Swisher (1990) state: "Any time students create or write... the teacher should capitalize on the sharing of this product as a way to continue to motivate other students to read and create" (p. 40).

Journal Writing

We used writing in the classroom in many more ways than just writing stories. One of the most effective ways we began our writing was through use of student journals. Over the years I have found use of such journals to be one context in which students feel successful in making meaning from writing. "As with reading, the

ultimate goal of writing is to make meaning, and the development of any writing program should depend upon the needs of the students as they try to effectively communicate their ideas in a variety of contexts" (Wason-Ellam, 1991, p. 45).

Using dialogue journals[8] has been a part of my classroom for at least thirteen years, though I have evolved my own format which is somewhat different from that of Atwell (1987) and Pierpont (1990), who use letter writing back and forth between student and teacher as a way to discuss literature. I use journals as a way to have an open discussion on topics self-selected by the students through informal letters between us. I have found that this activity gives me insight into my students' abilities and processing, as well as their interests and thoughts.

By having students keep their journals in large spiral notebooks, both the students and I were able to appreciate growth through the year in writing and thought processing. We were often amazed at the progress we noticed!

Having the students write in their journals as they entered school each day was productive in several ways. Because the first few moments of the day set the tone, I wanted my students to be productively engaged in an authentic activity which allowed them to express their true feelings concerning anything they wanted to tell me privately. I assured them that only I would read their entry unless they wished to share it with others. As they wrote, I used the time for taking roll, collecting money, doing reports, or other necessary housekeeping chores. I wanted the children to feel that they had my undivided attention as they talked to me about their interests and/or concerns; the journals gave me a way to do that with each student. I tried to make it a practice to write back to each individual daily, but sometimes I had to respond to several entries at one sitting if I got behind. (The students reminded me in their journals -- sometimes *forcefully* -- when I got behind!)

As I responded to each student, I tried to include correct spellings of as many misspelled words as I could and still have the response make sense. Although it took at least thirty minutes per day to respond to all students, it was probably the best-spent time that I had outside of direct interaction. Not only did I model correct spelling, mechanics, and grammar, I also modeled complete thoughts and tried to give validity and affirmation to their ideas and to them as people. Responding in the children's journals was one of the greatest opportunities I found to assure my children that I loved them and valued their ideas. It was remarkable how students

[8] Dialogue journals in this instance refers to student writings in journals to which the teacher responds in writing. The journals contain running conversations between student and teacher on topics of the student's choice.

"*blossomed*" when they realized that they could communicate in writing well enough that I could read and understand what they were saying and that I apparently thought it was worth my time to respond. Usually the first entries were very brief; but as the students gained confidence and anticipated my responses, their entries lengthened, as did my responses.

Each morning as the students entered, they grabbed their journals eagerly and rushed to read my response. Many times, they eagerly shared with a friend what I had written; sometimes bringing it to me, saying, "Listen to what you wrote in my journal...!" (They were so excited I never had the heart to remind them that I already *knew* what it said!) At some time every day we took time to share journals for those who seemed to need this affirmation. The students almost always wanted their friends to hear what they had written.

I never had trouble getting the students to write in their journals unless I had become lax in responding to them. Sometimes the physical task of responding every day to so many became a bit overwhelming. As a result of burnout, I tried an idea I had observed another teacher using and found that it worked well to relieve the burden of responding. During some of the time that the students were reading and writing, I would call two or three at a time to sit with me at a small table as I responded *in writing*, not orally, to their journal entries. This helped ease the burden of writing back, but I found that I missed that eagerness and sparkle in the eyes of my students as they anticipated reading the journal responses when they first came into the room each day. Because of that one factor, I found myself trying to have those journals ready and waiting each morning!

Wheeler (1990), in her chapter, "Showing the Way: Using Journal Writing to Develop Learning and Teaching Strategies," discusses the power of journal writing with students. Her example of gaining insight into student learning with her student Bill recalls a similar instance with my student Ralph. Though his journal entries are too personal to include here, much growth in his expression of thoughts was evident as the year progressed.

Although at the end of the school year Ralph still had far to go to be conventionally "*correct*," I treasured his growth more than that of almost any other child. Ralph, now almost ten years old and limited by a severe speech problem, had already repeated first grade. Ralph and his brother and sister, who were both served by EMR classes, were taken from an abusive home into the home of their 83-year-old grandmother, where they were greatly loved, but vastly deprived. At the beginning

of the year Ralph constantly hung his head, wouldn't try to read -- certainly not aloud -- and wasn't interested in writing or in school at all, for that matter. As Ralph gained confidence in himself, saw acceptance, felt valued as an important part of the class, and gained strategies in writing, reading, and speaking, his whole personality changed. I would never say that Ralph "*sparkled*," but I have seen that boy positively *beam*! He started out by having me read to the class everything he wrote when he wanted it to be shared. Gradually, he began to rush to me to read what he had written before it got "cold," so I could translate it for him. By the end of the year, he felt "smart" and would confidently read his work to the entire class. What a leap in confidence and in processing! Ralph's stories were among my favorites because they were so unexpected. His tales about himself and his friend Tom showed considerable insight and humor. I found his illustrations hilarious. I would hug him and laugh with him as he poked fun at himself and Tom through his stories. Tom would come up, look over Ralph's shoulder as he read to the class, and grin! Then Tom would hurry to write a story (with funny pictures) in response to Ralph's story. This same circumstance occurred several times. In fact it was one of those *unexpected* times which sparked great growth in processing and in strengthening the bond of our community. The other children enjoyed Ralph's stories so much (or possibly the attention he gained through them) that many of them began writing their own adventures about classmates. Ralph seemed to take on new importance in the class due to his writing efforts, with imperfections and all. This was a true case in which the accepting of approximations proved to be of great value to all involved.

Spelling -- Does It Matter?

Teachers of the writing process (Calkins, 1986, Graves, 1983, Manning & Manning, 1989) view spelling as a developmental process. Just as a parent does not expect an infant to wake up one morning speaking grammatically correct sentences, rather accepting "Da, Da" and other such nonsense words as having meaning and realizing that more correct language will follow as the child grows, hears more language, and constructs a system of language for him/herself; so teachers and parents must view the process of spelling as a developmental one with several distinct levels. There is much research to support the acceptance of spelling as a process, with particular emphasis being given to it by researchers Gary and Maryann Manning (1989). As these researchers stated, citing their own response to an editorial in the Birmingham News:

> ..."frequent and meaningful practice with reading and writing, frequent and meaningful interaction with other readers and writers, and appropriate spelling instruction in the process of writing will enable children to develop... to higher levels of spelling competence." The debate is not whether or not to teach spelling; rather, it is how and when to teach spelling (p. 102).

Constance Kamii[9] (1989) encourages teachers to include social interaction together with invented spelling as we get children to think about writing and spelling.

Because I view first drafts as needing to be focused on making sense of thoughts and meanings rather than on mechanics, I told the children at the beginning of the year that I would not correct their spelling when writing in their journals and on the rough drafts of their stories. For Alan, who was repeating second grade this year, was almost a non-reader when school began, and viewed spelling as one of his greatest problems, it was almost as if I had opened the door of a cage! Alan was another student who, like Ralph, was able to think at a much higher level than I was at first aware. As soon as the two boys gained enough confidence in me and in the other students to risk expressing their thoughts and realized that they would not be disparaged or embarrassed in any way, their thoughts were unleashed! Two of Alan's efforts are included in Appendix D. Notice the level of processing in the first entry and the growth in processing and level of thought noticeable in the second, even though the second is still full of emergent spellings and mechanical errors.

I enjoyed watching these boys unfold as if they were petals opening on a flower. Each layer of affirmation for effort expended brought forth another layer of effort. As the boys began to view themselves as worthy and "smart," they took many chances they would not have attempted in a less risk-free environment.

Drafting and Revising

One of the most troublesome areas of processing in my classroom was having the students come to the realization that drafting and revising were necessary when they intended their work to "go public." For very young children, such as my students, there is a fine line between being very accepting of first draft quality work so that enthusiasm and confidence are bolstered and expecting students to revise and re-draft their work in order to have it as correct as they can make it. Calkins and

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[9]Constance Kamii, world-renowned constructivist researcher, Piagetian scholar, and professor, focuses on social interaction in the context of fostering children's autonomy.

Harwayne (1987) discuss ways of helping young children learn to revise since

> ...[c]hildren of this age group... do not tend to write multiple drafts of a piece. Nor do they usually use the range of revision strategies that one might find in an upper-elementary class. A teacher can introduce revision strategies to these youngsters, however, and almost any strategy can be simplified enough to be applicable to the primary grades. For example, when six-year-old Steven writes:
>
> *My grandmother is a great cook*
>
> *It's fun at her house*
>
> his teacher might say, "Imagine Steven, that you're going to share your writing with the other students in the class. You're going to sit in the author's chair and read your story aloud, and then the children will have a chance to ask you questions. Steven, why not read your story to yourself right now and try to guess what questions your friends will probably ask when you share. You could even jot them down and we can chat about them." In this way, Steven begins to revise his writings so that it answers his reader's questions (p. 45).

But revision *can* happen in early grades. Note the comments of Don, one of the more able students in the class, in the interview excerpt which follows. At the beginning of the year Don wrote stories in which he would insert thoughts off the subject of his piece. In a story composed early in the year he wrote, "I am going to get a baby brother" in the very middle of a story about our field trip to the swimming pool. When I suggested he might want to consider moving the sentence about his baby brother to another spot or to another story, he cried. He took my comment as a reflection against his work. For a long time I was hesitant to comment on his habit of putting in errant thoughts, but as he saw other students revising their work, he began to be less intimidated about revising his. This interview in March shows a different perspective on his part:

Don: There's one thing I want to say about writing...

Teacher: OK. Good. What?

Don: It's hard... and there's one thing about it that's really hard... We always have to go back over it and write on it again and write on it again...

(Teacher bursts out laughing because it has been a struggle to teach the class to edit their work.)

Don: ... After you [I] look at it so many times you [I] say, "Uh, oh. I left out a period. Uh, oh. I left some words out. Oh, no. I didn't make sense."

Teacher: Do you like to go back and edit your own stories... fix them to make sense?

Don: Yeah.

Teacher: (Surprised.) You do?

Don: I... I do.

Teacher: You didn't like to do that at the beginning of the year, though, did you?

Don: No, not really. It was kind of starting to get kind of boring... But then after a while, after I read a lot of books, I thought it was kind of fun to do it!

Teacher: You're learning what grown-up authors do. They have to go back and read what they wrote and fix their mistakes, too.

(Excerpt from interview/conference with Don, 3/8/94. See Appendix C for full transcript.)

Writing: When Is It Too Much?

I found that it was possible to go overboard on the writing process... My students let me know about it!

An example which comes to mind is the writing experience and comments which followed a visit to our class by Bethany and her lamb. Bethany and her mother brought Bethany's two-week-old lamb into our class one afternoon. My students were thrilled with the baby lamb and vied for the opportunity to feed it its bottle. They petted it and asked many questions of Bethany and her mother.

When Bethany and her lamb left our room, I grinned and said to the class, "Guess what?!" The students moaned and said, "We KNOW... you want us to write about it!" (But even as they complained, they grinned.) I told them they could just jot down a sentence or two to capture a few thoughts about the experience and that they didn't have to edit it -- they just had to share it with me. (I had actually planned to have them write picture books, but I had been having them write so much for their class zoo book, drafting and re-drafting their efforts, that I decided I probably had pushed them hard enough. I wanted to stimulate writing through authentic experiences -- not kill it!) Three samples of these quick drafts are included in Appendix D to give an idea of the way students viewed the lamb.

The climax to my feeling of having them write almost to the point of *overkill* came several days later as I collected one dollar from each student to attend a performance of "The Emperor and The Nightingale" which was to be enacted by the children's theater group from a large city nearby. Some of the students said, "I'm not going. I know you'll just make us write about it!" (Of course I would have if they had not said that in addition to having complained about writing about the lamb experience earlier!) I quickly re-thought my strategy, assuring them that I would

NOT make them write about it, that I would read the story to them, and that we would talk about it before and after the performance... but that they WOULD NOT have to write about it. Several must have doubted that I could pass up such a rich opportunity for writing, because they made me promise!

At last the day of the performance arrived, and all of the students attended, enjoying the story itself, the actors, the costumes, the props, and the entire experience. We had a lively discussion of "favorite things" as we trooped back across the campus from the gym to our classroom. But the climax of the event to me was the question asked by Beth, in a doubtful tone, "Are you SURE we don't have to write about this?" Everyone just broke up with laughter, including me! I felt that the students were really able to envision writing possibilities connected with the experience because as we discussed the experience more fully in the classroom, many students began, "Well, if I had to write about this (at this point they would grin), I would tell about..."

I know these children loved writing, but they preferred informal, first-draft writing which they could share by reading aloud to more polished pieces which they had to edit through several revisions. I myself prefer their spontaneous first drafts because I enjoy seeing their progress in processing through the complexities, or lack of them, in their thoughts, sentence structure, spelling, mechanics, etc. I also enjoy the spontaneity and enthusiasm which are inherent aspects of first-draft writing. But I have "indoctrinated" my students to believe, as one of my graduate professors, Gary Manning, quipped, "If it goes public, it's perfect." By that, he meant if a writing effort is to be viewed by others, as in a letter written to someone, a story displayed in the hall or classroom, a book for others to read, etc., it should be in a final, finished form, as correct as the author can make it.

My students have evidently also come to value writing for themselves because every student began collecting topic ideas for future writing efforts this summer. The children had the idea of creating scrapbooks of ideas, sentences, key words, drawings, etc., for each to keep and add to as they had new ideas. They are planning to write about summer experiences and share those writings with me in the fall. I told them I thought they had a *wonderful* idea! I cannot think of anything they could have told me which would have pleased me more.

Making a *learning* workshop as we come to know

My imagination was fired with possibilities as I read the words of Nancie Atwell (1990) describing the best of all possible worlds:

> ... *[S]tudents and teachers would be writing and reading everything all day long... the child's day might become a learning workshop in which writing and reading are learned in the richest possible context and appreciated as tools of the highest quality for helping children come to know about the world* (p. xxii).

What a worthwhile goal for teachers... as we also *come to know*!

CHAPTER 6
CHOICE AS AN ESSENTIAL ASPECT OF LEARNING

Introduction

Of all of the categories into which the data in this study fell, choice was the one most remarked upon-- positively and negatively -- by those inside and outside our classroom. I suppose it was one of the more obvious of the categories, but its importance cannot be emphasized enough. I personally felt that this one category reached more students immediately than did any other because of the variety of circumstances in which choice could occur. The far-reaching effects of this category were felt in every other category observed within this classroom; however, this was the most controversial category commented upon by outsiders who were more traditional in their thinking. The classroom environment was much less structured due to choices available than the more traditional classrooms of my peers, causing me to explain and justify my practices more than once.

The wide variety of choices noted in this study ranged in type from choices in learning style (dealing with many different aspects of physical, emotional, and social choices) to choices in assignments; order of assignments; literature choices; decision-making choices, such as conduct decisions, choices to learn or not, etc.; choices in acceptable ways of sharing knowledge; choices in style of writing; choices in subject of writing -- the list could go on and on!

The Way We Began

As we began the school year this year, I used the first two weeks of school to acclimate the students to second grade and to my expectations. I used the second two weeks to allow them to experiment with various learning environments. They were allowed choices in lighting, sound, types of furniture, location in the room, intake of food during working times, mobility, etc. They were allowed choices of types of work; choices in the order of required assignments; choices in working alone, with partners, in small groups, with me, or without my direct instruction. They were allowed to read with me alone, with other students and me, with other students only, by themselves, etc. They were allowed to read at various times of the day and through various formats of instruction. After two weeks of intensive experimentation, each student was called individually to answer specific questions in response to an Individual Reading Style Inventory purchased from the Carbo Reading Styles

Institute. Individual student responses were entered directly into the computer onto a purchased program which scored those responses and generated a computer print-out giving a diagnosis for each student as to his/her individual strengths and preferences and recommended strategies for teaching reading to that student.

As soon as the print-outs were generated, I began implementation of the recommendations in my classroom. I endeavored to have the students practice their weaknesses by using their strengths. The students were *very* enthusiastic about this new way of working.

There is much research to support instruction based on student strengths and learning styles. Rita and Kenneth Dunn(1978) have identified at least twenty-one elements of learning styles, which they grouped into five major categories: environmental, emotional, sociological, physical, and psychological stimuli. Carbo (1992) adapted the studies done by the Dunns and formulated her own application of learning styles theory to the teaching of reading. Carbo delineates her ideas for reading success through a chart called "Three Keys to Reading Success" (p. 3). To paraphrase her ideas: (1) increase of motivation is gained through knowledge of reading styles, choices, high expectations for students, and use of high interest reading materials; (2) stress is decreased through informal environments, use of snacks, working with peers, choices, use of recorded books, positive reinforcement; and (3) matching strengths through global/analytic choices and perceptual choices (p. 3).

I found that I did not use all of Carbo's ideas exactly as she intended, particularly the matching of strengths to specified reading methods and behavioristic positive reinforcement. Nevertheless, I found much to be excited about in her work and took the parts which I felt would be most beneficial to my students and left those parts which conflicted with my ideas of best classroom practice.

I did not purchase the class analysis program but did an analysis myself which showed most of my students were in the good to fair range of auditory strengths with only one falling in the poor category; most were in the good to fair range of visual strengths with none appearing as "poor". The majority had strong tactual (tactile) preferences, and the majority had strong to moderate kinesthetic preferences. The other categories of style preferences were also analyzed and curriculum implications were written up for each category. Though it was very enlightening to test and analyze my students as to their preferences then capture them at work later and compare my analysis of findings with photos showing each in their preferred

setting (analysis and photos *did* match), I do not feel it necessary to take the time and go to the expense of this elaborate testing for preferences in future years. I think the concept is wonderful, but the conscientious teacher who observes her students and allows choices of all kinds in her classroom can make the same types of observations herself, without the use of an expensive computer program. Classrooms which are set up to accommodate all types of learning styles will accomplish the same things in a much more expedient manner. Gough (1987) puts it simply: "...a student is not an inert object to be worked on: a student is a human being with needs... The teacher's job is to facilitate... Teachers can't make students learn, but they can certainly set things up so that students want to learn (p. 661).

Appreciation From Within

When I interviewed the two instructional assistants who work daily and the other who works twice weekly, I was surprised at their interpretation of why this classroom was working so well. They all mentioned choice directly or alluded to it by mentioning some procedure which allowed choice. Also note the comments made by a student, Beth, in the following excepts from audio taped interview transcriptions.

Teacher: Have you noticed anything... What have you noticed about learning in this classroom... attitudes of the children... the way they work, and those kinds of things?

Janice: Well, I've noticed that by your letting them not be compelled [sic] to their desks all the time, you know, just letting them work wherever they want to... to me they're getting their work done better... and then, like, when you let them have snacks, I know with some children, they work better when they're eating. It just seems to me like they're working better. I know you don't allow them to have sweets, but just a snack... and it seems to me that they're doing their work better, and...

Teacher: Do you notice anything about their attitudes?

Janice: Yes, they're eager to do their work. I've never heard you having a problem of anyone not doing their work...

(Excerpt of transcription of Audio-taped Interview with Janice, Instructional Assistant, 3/8/94.)

Teacher: ...What can you see as a ... someone other than a teacher... about what was done to bring this climate, atmosphere, whatever you want to call it about? (Intervening comments occur.)

Sarah: Well, you also have given them... it's back to self-discipline... you've given them the opportunity to discipline themselves instead of standing over them and just really hounding them about behaving... you've given them a choice to behave, and they responded to that... whereas it's not been a structured, stand over them, you've got to sit here in this one spot. You know, that is a big difference in this classroom... where they can move about freely... and they choose to be quiet because they want to be able to move around freely. However that's brought about, I don't know how to word...

Teacher: I'm not sure, either... I've been thinking about that... so the differences that you notice... I'm not wanting any names... but like, do you think the structure is the main thing?

Sarah: Well, I feel like they have choices. It's not like... I feel like in a more structured classroom that a child does not... they're not allowed to be themselves... You know what I'm saying? They feel like there's someone over them all the time, forcing them to do...

Teacher: Which takes away their joy of...

Sarah: Um, hum... um, hum... When a person feels like they're achieving [sic] to do something... even a little person... it makes them want to do it. And that's what I see in here. At the beginning they were noisy like all the classes are, but I see in other second grade classes they are still dealing with discipline... and this classroom tends not to be doing that... they are working, not dealing with discipline.

Teacher: Do you think that... I have seen some of the students really having a good attitude about what they've learned...

Sarah: Um, hum... um, hum...

Teacher: ...Do you see anything along that line?

Sarah: I see that they are tickled to death to show me what they have learned. They have an enthusiasm, and they're allowed to express it. You know, and I haven't seen that in some of the other classrooms where everything has to be so hush, hush, and "tight" is the word I... You know... if they just have to be "close-knit" and they can't express... if they get a little loud, we just

giggle about it, and I like that atmosphere when I come in... that I don't have to be so quiet... that we can work back here; and if we laugh, it's okay to laugh... because they're having fun and learning... I like that...

(Excerpt of transcription of Audio-taped Interview with Sarah, Instructional Assistant, 3/7/94. See p. 126, Appendix F, for complete transcription.)

Teacher: What have you observed in the area of reading, writing, learning, attitudes about school, behavior... anything that you've observed, negative or positive?

Karen: As far as the whole group or...?

Teacher: Well, anything you want to say.

Karen: OK. I think that the whole group has worked out better than I... than I really thought. I didn't think that it would work -- letting them choose to sit in their seat or to sit in the floor. I really didn't think it would work because I thought it had to be more structured.

Teacher: Because you are a very structured person yourself.

Karen: Yes.

Teacher: And you really like having that structure?

Karen: Yeah. I like knowing what I'm going to do from one minute to the next. And from coming in here and then going into some of the other rooms that are structured, I can see that the children are happier in here than in the other classes.

(Excerpt of transcription of audio-taped interview with Karen, Instructional Assistant, 3/8/94. See p. 117, Appendix F, for complete transcription of conversation/interview with Karen.)

Teacher: OK. If you were the teacher, would you have your kids work in this way?

Beth: Yes.

Teacher: Why?

Beth: Because I just think it works better for them, 'cause they can wiggle around and, you know... It's just funner [sic].

(Excerpt from transcription of audio-taped interview/conference with Beth, Student, 3/8/94. See p. 130, Appendix H, for complete transcription.)

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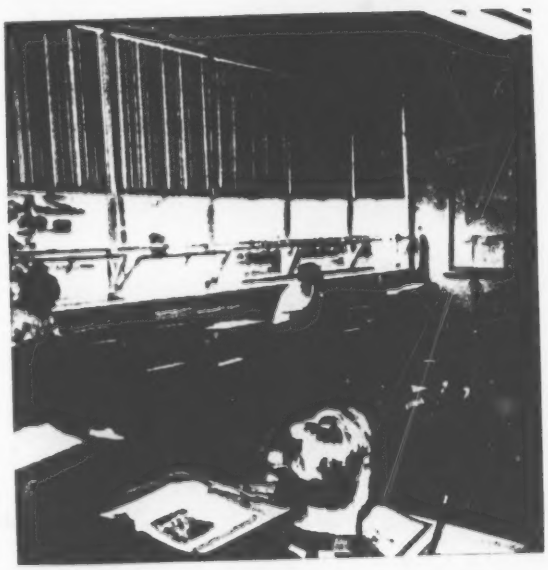
One Hour in Photos Shows Movement and Choice

May 10, 1994
First day back to school after being out for a weather day...

9:00 a.m. Photo #1
Karen is working with her group on editing. Janice is holding an individual conference with her student Jane. Bob is listening to a recorded book.

9:00 a.m. Photo #2
Mitchell is answering questions independently. Mark is taking a system-mandated reading test.

9:00 a.m. Photo #3
The other students are doing a retelling of a basal story of their choice. It is very quiet. All of the students are really working. Beth, Alan, and Don choose to work in their desks.



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9:00 a.m. Photo #4

Connie chose to work independently on a pillow in the floor. Although Tom and John are together on the beanbag, they are retelling different stories. They enjoy getting feedback from each other on their retellings as they go.

9:15 a.m. Photo #5

Robert and Alan join Tom and John on the beanbag to work on their retellings.

9:20 a.m. Photo #6

Connie reads to Janice from two books and the local newspaper. Don works at the computer writing a story. Jane and Sam are in the floor working on their retellings.

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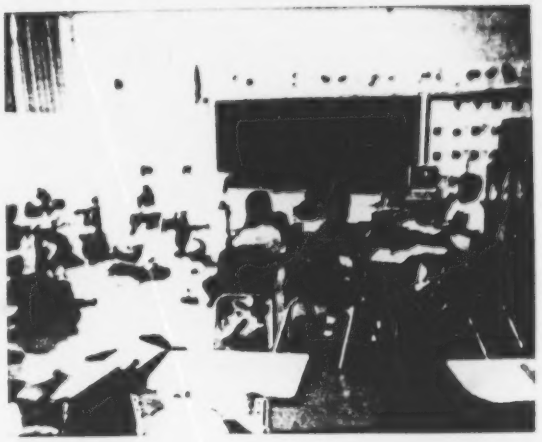
9:30 a.m. Photo #7

Movement is very important to these children. As soon as the instructional assistants leave, Tom, John, and Mark move to the center table to work. Notice Tom and John are still together though they are not communicating at the moment. They seem to like being close to each other as they work.



9:40 a.m. Photo #8

Movement is evident again. Notice Tom has moved to be able to better see the guiding questions. Connie has moved from the table to the beanbag. It is amazing to me to see how much movement is going on because it is extremely quiet and all students really seem to be working and appear to be concentrating on their retelling task. Jane, an ADHD child, is in the same spot on the floor; however, she sits up, then partially sits up, and lies down, constantly in motion.

9:50 a.m. Photo #9

Cathy requests a reading conference to share a book she has enjoyed. Tina comes up. Cathy asks if Tina can join in on the conference. I agree. Cathy has good processing, and Tina is also an excellent reader. Both giggle and enjoy sharing the book, See How They Grow: Kitten, with me.

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A Choice to Learn

The example from the classroom cited in this section gives credence to my statement that the five data categories (italicized and underlined in the following text) are intertwined. Polaroid snapshot #1 (See p. 110, Appendix E) gives an example of the learning style of these two boys. They were working together on an assignment. Here Mitchell was finished but stayed to help Robert complete his work. The students in this classroom did not desert one another if they were working together and one finished before the other, illuminating one aspect of the *community* concept evident in this particular situation. The first student finished usually coached the other, most times without telling direct answers. One of their most-often-used helping techniques was questioning, exploring meanings.

I took this picture (#1) because I thought it so clearly showed some aspects of learning style *choices*. Notice in the picture that the boys had barricaded themselves off in a tiny spot by the window (where it was light), under the air conditioner (where it was cool), beside the bookcase (so they had a back rest), sitting on the beanbag which they had squeezed into an oblong flat shape (so they had comfortable, soft seating). They *enjoyed* working together with only one peer in this instance rather than independently. They seemed to be asking for privacy by the arrangement of desk and chair to isolate themselves and insure no outside disturbance of their concentration while working. The boys appeared to be relaxed and involved in their efforts.

It is interesting to note this particular combination of boys. Roger, nearest the window, was one of the two students least able in reading and writing when school started. He showed weakness at the 2PP level on the basal IRI required at the beginning of school; however, during the course of the year, he read over two hundred books, ending the year well able to read and understand at a level equivalent to the end of a traditional second-grade basal, evidencing *good processing in reading*. Though he still needed to continue to practice his processing every day, Roger was truly a success story in reading.

Mitchell, working with Roger, was the same child who in January, when he came into this class, was disruptive, never still, and rarely attempted to complete any assignments. He was the same child used in the example on pp. 7-8 in Chapter 1 (See Appendix B, Video transcription #1, pp. 91-95) who enhanced my *teaching philosophy*. Through my viewing of his videotape, made in February, 1994, I realized an "*outsider*" stance is a necessary part of teaching and that he was very capable and

could be a valuable asset to our community of learners. It is really encouraging for me as a teacher/researcher to have concrete evidence (in this case a photo and an audio-taped interview in which the boys explained to me why they arranged themselves in such a manner to do their assignment.)

Mitchell truly fulfilled the possibilities I saw for him three months earlier. He became a hard-working -- still *fun-loving* -- much more autonomous individual.

Note that this picture was taken on May 16, just ten days prior to the end of school. I have not always had classes who really "*worked*" right up until the last of school, but this one did. The students had grown in their autonomy to the point that they invariably *chose* to complete their assignments -- not because I forced them to, but because it was the right thing to do. They *chose* to help their friends objectify knowledge. They *chose* to be responsible, cooperative members of our class community.

Two Dilemmas -- One Solution

One day in mid-November we had a most hectic day. The photo on p. 105 gives evidence to the fact that different students may chose to do the same things for very different reasons. It is important to the feelings shown in the picture to note that our day had been a very confused, exciting one. The president of a local bank (who also happened to be a close friend of mine) volunteered to work in our school for the day. I had requested an hour of his time during which he read a delightful Thanksgiving story to the children, changing his voice with the characters and making various hilarious noises to go along with his reading. The children became very aroused by his antics as he read!

The children asked him about his job, since we had been studying community helpers and careers at that time. He took time to tell them all about his work, and then he told them a story about our friendship when we were children growing up in school together. They were very eager to hear what I was like as a child and teenager! The children kept turning around to look at me and giggle and grin! Then he took turns listening to various class members read to him. They were really excited by his visit!

This was also the first day we had our completed book, Celebrations!, laminated and available for check-out. The children were on the look-out for any person they could find to listen to them read that book!

I had allowed two student-readers and a student-photographer to visit the

kindergarten to read to a class just a short time before.

We also had an animal show scheduled to begin about fifteen minutes after our celebration of Jane, who had scored 2,000 points on a computer game. Jane had just enjoyed her success. It was also the day before we were to get out for the Veterans' Day holiday. All in all, it was a wild day! I had just told the children they had ten minutes to finish up anything they had not completed. I looked over and saw that Cathy and Jane had put on earphones. (Notice that the cords are attached to nothing!) The expressions on their faces reveal very different reasons for the use of the headsets. Cathy appeared frustrated by the noisy anticipation of the animal show as she tried to finish one last part of an assignment. She wanted to block out the noise to focus her concentration. Jane, on the other hand, was still smiling! She wanted to enjoy thinking about her 2,000 points with no distractions!

A Choice to Work

I was constantly on the alert for different ways students used choice in the classroom once I realized how important it was to them. On May 4, 1994, I became intrigued with noticing what effect choice of order of assignments had for many students. Two students were not in the room at the time, but I took a few minutes to interview those who were in there to find out just how they decided to divide their time between easy and difficult assignments.

First I asked three students sitting with me a question.

Teacher: If I made you do your assignments in order, would you worry about getting through?

Cathy: Yes.

Robert: Yes

Sam: No.

Then I called up the rest of the students and asked them individually to answer these questions.

Teacher: Do you do your assignments in order? Which type of assignments do you usually do first, the easy ones or the harder ones? Why?

Cathy: I skip around, but I usually do the hard ones first so I can go on and get done with the hard and then do the easy. Once I'm through with the hard ones, I know I'll get finished.

Robert: I skip around, usually with the hardest first. I want to get done with the hard. I like to get it over with.

Sam: I skip around. I do the easy first and save the hard till last because it gives you more time to work on the hard ones.

Beth: I skip around. I like to get the easy done and get it out of the way so I'll have more time to do the hard.

Connie: I skip around. I do the easy first. You can get it done, then you can ask for help so you get done faster.

Ralph: I do my work straight in order on math because it's fun. I like math and all that. But in reading I have to skip around. I do the easy first because it's easy. I do the hard last because I want to get done with the easy first so I'll have time to think about the hard.

Mark: I go straight in order. Whenever I don't do it in order I think I might skip something.

Tina: I like to skip around. You'll get it done faster. I like to do the hard first because I'm saving the easy till last. I feel like I'm almost finished once I get the hard part done.

Jessica: I skip around and do the easy first because I can do it faster. Then I have more time to spend on the hard.

Alan: I always skip around and do the hard first. When I do the easy first the hard makes it seem longer. When I do the hard first, the easy makes it seem faster.

Jane: Sometimes I go straight in order, and sometimes I skip around. I like the hard first. I do the hard first 'cause it helps you go faster than doing it the other way.

John: I skip and do the easy first because I can do it faster that way.

Bob: I like to skip around because some stuff I don't know how to do, so I skip it so I can get help. I do the hard first because when I get to it I will have already done it. It makes me feel like the pressure is off when the hard is done.

Tom: I always skip around and do the hard first. Why? 'Cause it's easier to do the hard ones, then do the easy ones 'cause its better. I feel like I've got the worst over with when the hard is over -- then it's easy!

These children are very comfortable with telling me why they make decisions

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as to their work. I think it would be very difficult for some of these children to have to modify their preferences for working order to meet some arbitrary scheme I might devise. It really is unimportant for me that the students work in a particular order on their independent assignments. I care that they do the assignments and that they put forth effort to do them well. I care that the assignments are completed. I care that the students have pride in a job well done. Before this informal questioning, I did not realize what a range of preferences we had in this class. Only one student said he always did his work in order. Only two said they sometimes did their work in order. Seven who skipped around did the hard work first, while six did the easier part first. All had valid reasons for their choices and I saw no reason to ask them to change their way of working to please anyone other than themselves. I really think that allowing this particular choice is a major reason that I did not have to force my students to do their assignments. By the middle of the year every child did all assignments every day. That was unusual in some areas of the school In fact, one of the instructional assistants commented on the fact that I did not have to *force* my students to do their work – that they *chose* to do it themselves.

I think that what happened in this vignette is what happens every time people, whether young or old, are given sufficient chances to choose for themselves. The people invariably learn what works best for them -- even if they have to learn it the *hard* way -- and they grow toward being more autonomous individuals who learn to take responsibility for their choices. Autonomy, or being governed by oneself, is "the goal of education," according to Constance Kamii (Kamii & Joseph, 1989, p. 46). Allowing choice is one way educators can foster autonomy in the classroom.

CHAPTER 7

ENJOYMENT, ENTHUSIASM, AND PRIDE AS CONTAGIOUS COMPONENTS OF THE WHOLE

Introduction

A very unexpected and wonderful part of this study was the spontaneous display of enjoyment, enthusiasm, and pride which spilled over from practically every activity in this classroom. The component categories which emerged from this study found expression through our exuberant affirmation.

> *Principal:* *When I entered your classroom, students -- and you-- were excited. You all did not want me to leave until I heard somebody read! . . . I kept thinking, this is what it's all about! They're excited, they really want to read, and they wanted me to hear them read. They took pride . . . I noticed pride . . . They were proud of what they could read to me . . . not just wanting to read because I was the "principal," they were just proud that they could read and they wanted to show me that they really liked it. And you, too . . . I noticed that you were excited. You wanted me to hear them read because they wanted to do it so badly. I could tell it was a really good year for both of you, and I think your excitement rubbed off on them . . .*
>
> (Excerpt from interview with elementary principal, 6/2/94. See p.133, Appendix I, for full transcription of this revealing interview.)

One of the most delightful books I have read is Burton's Joy in Learning: Making It Happen in Early Childhood Classes (1991). Burton makes many important points concerning good practice in early childhood instruction. My thoughts concerning curiosity and children's need for interactive, joyful experiences parallel his work. He states:

> *Curiosity and an inquiring mind develop in a natural way in the very early years. Hence, the stimulation of originality, imagination, spontaneity, independence, openness, intuition, inquiry, and exploration is essential to the continued development of the child's inherent potential. These continue learning and . . . [foster] . . . greater explorations* (p. 9).

As I delved further into his work, I found additional support for what I have come to believe was one of the most meaningful parts of this study -- enjoyment -- or joy in learning.

I found my own attitude to be contagious; the more excited I became about

learning and the children, the more excited the children became; the more excited they became, the more excited I became. It was a spontaneous, contagious cycle which made school fun for all of us.

Burton suggests that we reflect on those things that do cause us joy as well as those things which disrupt joyous feelings. He says:

> *It is as important for children to become sensitive to what causes joy as it is for them to know what causes the lack of joy. Giving attention to such matters will prepare children to become more conscious of things that can contribute to joy, eventually creating a mind-set for seeking it out* (p. 66).

Poetry , Laughter, and Good Feelings

The enthusiasm for learning in this classroom was constantly evident. As children found literature they particularly enjoyed, they moved to share that selection with friends, with me, and often with more than one group or individual. As one child, John, explored Shel Silverstein's A Light in the Attic and Where the Sidewalk Ends, he would constantly share poems with his friends, saying, "Do you get it? Do you get it?" If they did understand, the children would laugh together at the absurd humor of Silverstein's poetry; if the other child did not "get it," John patiently explained, and *then* they laughed! John became so enthralled with Silverstein's poetry that he checked out both books I had borrowed from my daughter. I was hesitant to let him check out her personal copies, but he was insistent that he would take good care of them (which he did) and told me that he just *had* to read those books to his family. He read every page of both books (169 pages in one and 166 pages in the other), reading and re-reading those poems as he shared with his family, friends, and every person who walked into our room.

Laughter was an integral part of this classroom, especially after the children discovered those two books. I was amazed at the way my boys in particular latched onto Silverstein's poetry. Whenever possible the boys would grab me to share something else funny they had found in those books. When one person would begin sharing poetry, particularly as I was conferencing with students, a group would immediately form around us as others came up to enjoy the poems. There was a constant clamoring for those two books; they were checked out every night. The girls were jealous because they said the boys monopolized the books. I do not think I have ever used books which more quickly captured the attention of my students, particularly the boys. They enjoyed Silverstein's drawings almost as much as his

poetry. They were also intrigued by the rhythms and the flow of the words. A particular favorite due to the rhythm and flow was "The Twistable, Turnable Man." The children would read it over and over, not slowly, but quickly, to become caught up in the pattern of words. I could name poem after poem which appealed strongly to particular students for particular reasons. I found the students gravitating to those books constantly, sharing favorites, reading and re-reading selections to themselves and to friends. The books became unexpected sources of inspiration for student creations. For example, two students created their own poetry based on Silverstein's "Smart" -- Don took the approach of writing his own version which he also titled, "Smart," while Mitchell wrote his own version of "Rich." This sparked a rash of such poems by others in the class who enjoyed their efforts. (See picture #2, p. 110, in Appendix E which shows John, Bob, and Tom sharing favorite parts of Silverstein's books with me at our project table. The photo was taken by Robert who valued this as an important instance of something good happening in our community.)

Silliness Becomes Productive

Other authors who were a source of constant enjoyment for the class were Harry Allard and James Marshall, authors of "The Stupids" books. I had known the power of their book, Miss Nelson is Missing!, but I had never known their "Stupids" books until this year when my fourteen-year-old daughter pulled one from the municipal library shelf as I was checking out a selection of books for my classroom. She said, "Mom, you should get all of these books for your children. I used to *love* to read them when I was little." I was a little hesitant and embarrassed because of the title and what might possibly happen in the classroom when I introduced the term "stupid," but I took in The Stupids Have a Ball and The Stupids Die and was *amazed* at the response by the students. They were constantly read and re-read, shared and re-shared, during that two-week period in which they were checked out for classroom use. The following exert from fieldnotes explains the circumstances:

> *Robert is enjoying reading The Stupids Die, by Harry Allard and James Marshall this morning. He has come to me several times to share humorous instances from the book. He has then gone around the room, from person to person and from group to group saying, "Listen to this..." and reading aloud to them the passage in which members of the Stupid family think they're dead because the lights went out.*

John and Beth hear us talking and come over to tell what they think is funny about "the Stupids". Mitchell comes over, also, to listen. They each quote their favorite parts. They get the other "Stupids" book, The Stupids Have a Ball, reading page after page to me to illustrate points about how silly this family is.

They point out passages such as the ones in which the boy sticks his toes into the punch and then everyone drinks it, the mother makes a dress out of chickens and wonders if it is too "loud", the family goes into the shower together to eat breakfast and then wonders why they have "runny" eggs, the father is so proud of his young son for finally learning some "manners" as he eats with his toes, etc.

They also point out illustrations which are hilarious to them. They especially like the picture of the clock with the numbers sprinkled at random around the edges of the clock face and the announcement that it is noon when the clock strikes eleven. They point out a picture of a bird that is captioned, "Bus". They laugh and giggle and can't quit sharing the two books until I gently calm them down.

(Excerpt from fieldnotes, 1/31/94.)

The following day John, Tom, and Robert shared both "Stupids" books with the class and then shared a self-initiated writing project, just completed, in which they wrote their own "Stupids" book, The Stupids Go to a Carnival. (See p. 109, Appendix D, for a sample from the book written by the boys.)

Observer Comments from my fieldnotes for that day share my reflections as my perspective was once again altered through classroom research:

I was totally unprepared for the response from the students as to those two "Stupids" books. I thought the name "Stupid" might give my students the idea that it would be all right to use that name in class. I was really nervous about the repercussions and bad feelings or unpleasant situations which might occur as a result of introducing that term into my classroom. It has really surprised me that such enthusiasm and creativity have resulted from two books that had such non-appeal, bringing really even a sense of unease, for me.

Not one student has yet used the term "stupid" in reference to anyone in the class. They seem only to use it in reference to the family in the book.

> *My whole class has been enthralled by the books. I took the books home last night to look up passages to complete yesterday's fieldnotes. I left the books in my car this morning. My students clamored so for those books that I took the first opportunity of having an adult come into my room to go to the car and get the books!*
>
> *This whole situation has persuaded me that an adult can never really predict how a child will respond to a book. It has also reminded me of the keen sense of the ridiculous that second-grade students have! It was really enjoyable to observe children having such fun with books and displaying such enthusiasm while sharing them...*
>
> (Excerpt from fieldnotes, 2/1/94.)

This instance recalls to mind a passage from John Dewey in which he says, "I have always been struck by the interest taken in small children, in their doings and sayings . . . these children . . . bring something fresh into the world, a new way of looking at it, a new way of feeling it" (1930, p. 3).

On further reflection of this instance, as I have gained distance in time from its occurrence, I can see another unexpected and valuable aspect of this situation (one that was typical of other instances in this classroom). That aspect is that Robert, who was at the beginning of the year a very, very poor reader, was being affirmed as having good judgment about choosing books by John and Beth, two of the more able readers in the class. I did not see students categorizing each other in negative ways based on "smartness" or lack of it, which was a wonderful, unexpected, benefit of this type of literacy learning environment.

Shared Happy Times

Another of the components of literacy in our classroom which seemed to bring great opportunities for feeling, expressing, and sharing joy was the rich variety of illustrations found in the literature we read. The students were often drawn to certain books at first simply because of the illustrations. We got into many discussions about why we liked certain illustrations, and how they made us feel, as well as what materials the illustrator chose for particular illustrations and possible reasons for those choices.

We often discussed specific ways the illustrator used the artwork to carry out ideas in different types of literature. One of the easiest types for the children to explain at first was picture book illustrations. They easily pointed out expressions

and specific details which carried forward ideas expressed or implied by the text of the story. The children observed carefully and attempted to have their own illustrations expand picture books which they had created.

The children were always eager to find other books by favorite illustrators. I often noticed them studying the illustrations as they read and re-read books. Illustrations were helpful to students as they predicted and confirmed meaning.

Many opportunities arose for students to express orally what they saw in illustrations and how this made them feel. This was an authentic opportunity for students to use descriptive oral language and to extend vocabulary.

I frequently heard students talking about reasons they enjoyed certain illustrations or illustrators. I had not thought about what a rich opportunity this was to extend oral literacy until reading Stewig's (1989) monograph. He says that we need to

> *. . . teach children to 'read' such visual input–to examine it carefully part by part, extracting meaning and interacting with what is extracted . . . [and] . . .to put coherent thoughts into words, words into sentences, and sentences into larger units . . . Putting thoughts about what was learned visually into spoken words is an important challenge all children should experience "* (p. 56).

We often took time to discuss illustrations as I read books to the class. I found that the students had grown in observation, appreciation, and expressing coherent comments as the school year progressed. Describing the illustrations was one of our shared, happy times.

An Unexpected Bonus: Fun!

The unexpected bonus to having enjoyment, enthusiasm, and pride emerge in our classroom was that school became a fun place to be -- for my students and for me. None of us could wait to see what would happen next. We were constantly on the alert for funny things to share, books that gave us warm feelings, writing efforts that had meaning for us, etc. We became a bonded, closely-knit "family" who loved each other and enjoyed sharing together. Anticipation levels were high throughout the year. We felt successful and proud of everything we accomplished. We expected good things -- and we received them!

CHAPTER 8
CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

Introduction

How can a literacy learning environment be seen as effective through the eyes of the students, the teacher, and the classroom instructional assistants? Pierce (1990) puts it aptly: "[e]ffectiveness . . . is a complex, interwoven tapestry of. . . interactions between individuals and events and bound by time and situation . . . [It is a]... holistic force or phenomenon which pervades and influences teacher behaviors, student behaviors, and classroom events" (p. 133). In this literacy learning environment effectiveness was influenced by two underlying questions:

- How do students perceive themselves as successful/important individuals?
- How can a combination of teacher-held beliefs and practices alter student literacy learning?

Discussion of the Findings

In this study, a self-contained, process-oriented second-grade class was studied in a variety of ways during its language arts activities and instruction. This study attempted to generate a *thick* description and an interpretation of the social organizations, interactions, and attitudes displayed within the classroom. Viewpoints of effectiveness were obtained from students, the classroom instructional assistants, the teacher (as insider) to give the perspective from within the context. Other viewpoints of effectiveness were gained from parents, administrators, other teachers, the researcher (as outsider) to give the perspective from outside the context.

Various methods of gaining insider/outsider perspectives were used including participant observation which incorporated observations recorded as audio and video tapes and fieldnotes, formal and informal interviews, and collected artifacts comprised of written efforts, documents, drawings, and Polaroid snapshots.

Observations over time indicated that effectiveness emerged through five categories of interpretation which were fully discussed in the body of this paper, specifically in chapters three through seven. To reiterate the categories, they were as follows:

1. Philosophy of education and the literacy environment
2. Importance of building community in the classroom
3. Power of the process approach to literacy
4. Choice as an essential aspect of learning
5. Enjoyment, enthusiasm, and pride as contagious components of the whole (referring to the whole literacy environment and process)

The definition of the effectiveness of the literacy learning environment of this study contained some commonalities, drawn from the various insider/outsider perspectives. All observers appeared to value interactive processing as a method of demonstrating effectiveness in this study, with insider viewpoints giving this interactive processing more weight much earlier in the year than did outsider viewpoints. Insiders seemed to realize the effectiveness much sooner because they were immersed in the process itself and caught flashes of enjoyment, enthusiasm, pride and growth in achievement, self-esteem, and community as they occurred. Outsiders tended to note the effectiveness later because they were more removed and thus unable to see depth of effectiveness as quickly. Because they were in the classroom for shorter periods of time, it was not until they were conscious of a busy, involved classroom setting with purposeful noise and clutter, few discipline problems, and enthusiastic learners, demonstrating elevated performance levels in reading and writing that they could appreciate the effectiveness of the learning situation. Both insiders and outsiders appeared to recognize the value of this "process-oriented" classroom. Cambourne and Turbill (1987) assert:

> *. . .these 'process-oriented' classrooms are highly structured, organised [sic] and robust learning settings. They are classrooms in which certain conditions exist that coerce young learners to develop their own set of strategies to solve the written language puzzle in the ways which best suit their personal needs . . .* (p. 66).

Such appears to have been the case in this study as students constructed ways of managing language in order to gain meaning. The three aspects of language development mentioned by Halliday (1982) as being interrelated and occurring simultaneously -- those of learning language, learning through language, and learning about language -- seemed to have been experienced by students in this classroom, even though they were not expressly designated as such.

Although the children did not differentiate between these aspects of language development, a distinction should be made by the researcher and the practitioner. Learning language is the process of constructing a system of language by the learner. Learning through language is the process of using language to construct meaning about the world around them. Learning about language is the process of becoming cognizant of language itself, its composition and uses. Halliday's view of language development became the basis of this study. The research and practice of recent years have led to some fundamental generalizations and theories about language development which seemed to be occurring within my own classroom. These are stated succinctly by Jaggar (1985) as the common perspective from which the compilation of writings known as Observing the Language Learner was written. She lists them as follows:

> **Language learning is a self-generated, creative process.** Children learn language without explicit instruction. They learn it naturally through experience, by listening to others, experimenting and practicing in situations where language serves genuine purposes.
>
> **Language learning is holistic.** The different components of language – function, form and meaning – are learned simultaneously. Children acquire new and more complex forms and functions for language when they want to express new and more complex meanings. In the process they also learn that the forms used to express meaning and intention may vary depending on the purpose and context.
>
> **Language learning is social and collaborative.** Children acquire language in meaningful interactions with others who provide models and support their learning by responding to what they are trying to say and do, rather than to the form.
>
> **Language learning is functional and integrative.** Children do not learn language and then learn to use it. They acquire language and learn to communicate with it simultaneously, and in the process also learn how to use language to think and learn.
>
> **Language learning is variable.** Because language is inherently variable, the meanings, the forms and the functions of children's language will depend on their personal, social, and cultural experiences (p. 4).

It is interesting to note that while insiders and the outsiders interviewed in this study tended to designate the language literacy environment in this classroom as

effective, not all teachers, parents, or administrators would do so. For those persons who come from a more mechanistic paradigm (Aldridge, 1991) -- who value one right answer to every problem, who value product over process, who value order and quiet in the learning environment, who measure success in terms of standardized test scores -- this literacy learning environment would be seen as anything *but* effective! There are no valid, measurable, concrete results of this study to prove how effective the literacy learning environment really is or is not. The measurements are not objective; they are very much subjective, which are the preferred measures in qualitative research. The fact remains that much progress in literacy, in community-building, in learning -- and enjoyment of the process -- was made in this classroom. The conversation/interview between Karen and the teacher/researcher (given in full on pp. 117-125, Appendix F) reveals a change in perspective which occurred on the parts of both individuals as they watched the effectiveness of the situation unfold throughout the school year. Karen, the assistant, changed positions from believing at the beginning of the year that the process would never work to becoming an advocate of having all classes work this way, even going so far as to suggest that this approach be carried on the next year with these same children to further enhance their progress. The teacher/researcher was unclear exactly *how* the combination of events was ignited but could see the cumulative effect of various aspects of this learning environment as they meshed to form what she deemed to be a workable, effective learning environment.

The teacher/researcher, in this conversation/interview, also mentioned her feelings of gaining knowledge by viewing the classroom through the lens of the video camera. This acknowledgment of the power for teachers as they view their classrooms through "outsider" perspectives seems to indicate that one of the purposes of this study was met -- that of qualitative classroom research informing the practice of practitioner/researchers.

Cambourne and Turbill (1987) challenge teachers to conduct such research in their own classrooms in order to inform their perceptions:

> *Teachers should be aware of the coping strategies their children use and know why they are using them . . . Teachers need to understand how reading, writing, talking, and listening are interrelated . . . Overall. . . teachers need to consider quite a different set of beliefs about how young learners solve the written language puzzle. And we maintain that if teachers take the opportunity to observe their children in action, they will validate from their own observations*

> *and data what we have written. They will then know why their children follow the learning path that they choose to take. They will be better armed to support and instruct the young learners in their care. Classrooms will be settings where teachers have confidence in what they are doing and trust that their children are learning* (p. 70).

A major premise generated from the inductive data analysis of this classroom was that the social organization of this classroom was constructed jointly by the students, the teacher, and the instructional assistants who regularly worked in this class. I, the teacher, assumed the role of facilitator and encourager of students. I set up the classroom environment and climate in order to promote literacy learning, building of community and self esteem. I valued individual differences in people and in processing. I actively promoted cooperation and collaboration while discouraging competition in the classroom. The students and assistants appeared to take direction from the attitudes and values displayed by this teacher/researcher.

Apparently, there was not just <u>one</u> facet of the literacy learning environment which could explain the effectiveness of that environment. It seemed that the combination of the five tightly interwoven themes was the underlying source of success in this classroom. (The reader is cautioned to bear in mind, as mentioned previously, that the success seen in this study is relative to the perspectives of the observer. Not all observers would draw similar conclusions as to effectiveness.) However, the combination of practices and belief-structures which prevailed in this classroom seem to have made a positive difference with all participants. The teacher, the students, and all three assistants obviously enjoyed their class and each other. There was no pressure from competition. There was a sense of community, a feeling of freedom, and an opportunity for a wide range of choices which affected all aspects of literacy learning. All individuals participating in this classroom evidenced a strong sense of autonomy and self-reliance.

The teacher's belief in valuing, caring, belonging, and sharing enabled her to create, with the students and assistants, a relaxed, open, risk-free environment. The acceptance and valuing of individuals and approximations toward success were also important aspects of this flourishing classroom.

The students' empathy toward each other was encouraged. This supportive atmosphere encouraged risk-taking and led to successful educational and personal experiences in the classroom. However, it was the students themselves who made the greatest contribution to the effectiveness of this classroom. Kamii (1990) says:

> *Many educators such as John Dewey have amply demonstrated that children learn for themselves when they are personally involved and committed to activities that are meaningful to them. Young children are curious and come to school eager to learn. Educators' task is to build on this natural motivation . . ."* (p. 172).

Ort and Shelly (1993) in their work with social studies found the importance of "bridging" ideas and information in order for students to more fully understand relationships. Having found their work equally applicable to literacy, I attempted through this study to implement the conditions they cite as most conducive to learning:

> *Those who have studied learning have found that students learn when several conditions are met. The first . . . [is] that what is being learned must be relevant . . . The second condition . . . [is] that knowledge must be constructed by the learner . . . The third condition . . . [is] that the learner must be actively involved in the learning . . . The fourth condition . . . [is] that the student must build the connections between what is already known and understood to that which is new . . .* (pp. 2-3).

This study is an attempt to describe the ways in which these particular students were involved with and committed to literacy learning, making meaning through bridging connections.

Dillon (1989) sums up the need for such studies in her call for allowing teachers to construct

> *. . . a model of teaching that works for each of them in their specific setting and with various groups of students . . . [having] . . . [a]t the heart of these models... the goals of developing relationships with students, believing in students' abilities to learn, listening to students to gain a better understanding of what they know and how they learn, and providing students with meaningful experiences during classroom lessons. In a time of growing accountability, where effectiveness is being measured only through rising test scores, effective teaching and meaningful learning may soon be lost* (p. 256).

Implications

Just what importance, if any, does this study have for practitioners in the classroom? Are these results applicable? The results of this study show that perceptions of teachers can change over time in primary classrooms, especially through the double lens of the teacher/researcher as insider/outsider within

his/her own classroom. Introspection and reflection are valued as aspects of practitioner research which enable the teacher to think about and express a personal belief system or philosophy of teaching, acknowledging that this philosophy will affect *how*, *why*, and *what* she/he teaches.

This study attempts to present an alternative view of language construction to those readers who have never attempted holistic, process-oriented styles of teaching. It is hoped that the qualitative aspect of this research furnishes readers with sufficient rich, literal descriptions, full of specific examples and details, which will enable them to enter the study as "insiders," to draw their own conclusions, and to reflect on their own ideas, interpretations, and classroom practices.

The study further attempts to contribute to the current body of qualitative research in gaining an in-depth picture of an early-childhood process-centered language literacy environment in an effort to add another piece to the emerging puzzle of meaning-making in the construction of language.

Summary

In summary, this study has added to research in the field of language literacy in the early grades by enumerating five interactive components of this classroom which were woven together to form the mesh of an effective literacy environment. The study was conducted on a daily basis over an extended period of time. Conclusions drawn were based on data collected and inductively analyzed through participant observation and interviewing. The study offers teachers possibilities for changing perceptions of their own teaching through research practices in the classroom.

Limitations

This study is limited by the fact that only one class and one teacher were studied. It would have been preferable to have observed several classes and several teachers in many different settings if the purpose of this study were to generalize findings. In this case the purpose was *not* to generalize findings across many settings, rather it was to have in-depth study of one class over time.

The study was limited yet strengthened in a second way. Because the teacher was also the researcher in her own classroom, it was very difficult to maintain outsider objectivity except in instances of viewing video tapes, hearing audio tapes, or reading fieldnotes. This very limitation, on the other hand, can be viewed as a strength in that, as an insider, the teacher/researcher had a depth of knowledge of the context which aided immensely in interpretation of the data. The amount of time spent with the subjects also gave additional insight to the teacher/researcher.

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APPENDIX A
TIME FRAME

Δ INITIATION OF STUDY.....August,1993

(Site and subjects selected, access gained)

Δ Meeting with UAß advisor to plan and discuss project direction.....August, 1993

Δ Permission obtained from administration to implement innovative literacy practices/learning styles in the classroom as basis of study.....August, 1993

Δ Permission obtained from parents to involve students in this study.....August, 1993

Δ EXPLORATORY PHASE OF RESEARCH.....August-December, 1993

(Artifacts collected, fieldnotes taken, informal interviews held)

Δ Reading style choices explored.....August, 1993

Δ Reading style computer analysis completed.....September, 1993

Δ Individual Reading Inventories administered (pre-tests).....September, 1993

Δ Introduction of classroom photography.....October, 1993

Δ Creation of Celebrations!.....October-November, 1993

(a focus on positive aspects of classroom)

Δ Daily check-out of classroom camera by students to complete home photography/writing assignments.....November - December, 1993

Δ MEDIAL PHASE OF RESEARCH.....January-March, 1994

(Prior data collection methods continued, strengthened by addition of formal interviews, audio-tapings, and video-tapings)

Δ Mid-year portfolio evaluations and audio-tapings of miscue analysis.....January, 1994.

Δ Individually audio-taped running records of Groundhog's Day poetry.February, 1994

Δ Extensive video-taping of individual students reading to camera.....February, 1994

Δ Formal interviews with key informants.....March, 1994

(Students: Beth and Don; Instructional Assistants: Karen, Sarah, and Janice)

Δ Formal interviews with all students.....March, 1994

Δ FORMAL (EXTENSIVE) PHASE OF RESEARCH.....April-May, 1994

(All prior data collection methods continued)

Δ In-depth contact with parents. and administrators.....April - May, 1994

Δ Formal interviews with parents.....April - May, 1994

Δ Second formal interviews with students and instructional assistants.....April, 1994

Δ Third formal interviews with students.....May, 1994

Δ Formal interviews with fifth grade reading partners.....May, 1994

Δ Year-end portfolio evaluations.....May,1994

Δ CONCLUDING PHASE OF RESEARCH.....June-August, 1994

Δ Formal interviews with administration.....June, 1994

Δ Formal writing-up of research.....June - July, 1994

Δ Defense of research.....August, 1994

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APPENDIX B
FIELDNOTE CODING KEY[10]

SYMBOL:	DESCRIPTION OF CIRCUMSTANCE:	KEY USED IN "ZAPF DINGBATS" FONT
▲	Appearances of descriptive postures which convey attitudes	s
✪	Instances of thick description	a
■	Mention of physical difficulties	n
✳	Instances of movement (Each specific time of movement is indicated by an * within the text.)	S
✪	Descriptions of processing in reading	b
✚	Occurrences of multiple activities at one time	:
↔	Mention of noise	option /
○	Instances of absorbed concentration	m
❖	Instances of conversation	v
⇨	Contrasts to usual behavior	option S
⊃	Interruptions/disturbances	option/shift:
▮	Appearance of fatigue	z
➤	Acknowledgment of changes of opinion	option R
♣	Instances of silent communication	option r
❤	Humorous comments/occurrences	option 6
➳	Observations of learning style preferences (a type of classroom *choice*)	option/shift Z

ADDITIONAL FIELDNOTE CODES

TC:	Refers to teacher comments or reflections.
OC:	Refers to observer comments or reflections.

[10] This fieldnote coding key was used for this sample video tape transcription only. Actual fieldnotes were encoded with colored dots. The coding used here is for purposes of ease of reproduction of this paper.

SAMPLE OF CODED FIELDNOTES[11]

Video Transcription
Second Session, Video #1
February 10, 1994
8:30 a.m. - 8:55 a.m.

First actual taping of student reading to video camera:
Mitchell reads Nate the Great, by Marjorie Weinman Sharmat.

TC: Although students have read to the video camera for four days, all other readings have been taped over. This is the first time a student has read for the camera, hopefully, after the "newness" has worn off.

Mitchell, our newest class member, is the first to read to the camera. I did not tell him that I would keep this tape, because I did not

▲ want the camera to intimidate him. He appears very relaxed and not nervous at all that I can observe.

Mitchell is an attractive, brown-haired, brown-eyed eight-year-old boy wearing a medium-blue and navy striped, long-sleeved Tee-shirt and faded blue jeans which have a large, ragged hole worn completely through at

✿ his right knee and a smaller worn area at his left knee. He wears tennis shoes and no belt.

Mitchell is difficult to understand because his speech is unclear. (He sees the speech pathologist twice weekly for thirty minutes each

■ session.)

OC: Mitchell sits* on the edge of the beanbag with his legs extended, and softly reads aloud to the camera from a copy of Nate the Great which was just brought in from the city library last week.

✳ Mitchell reads fluently, in a conversational tone. He has no difficulty at all with the vocabulary in this book. He rocks* his right leg back and forth. He holds* the book closely to his eyes except when turning pages, as he begins reading the book. He then lowers* the book to his legs,

✳ which are extended in front of him at floor-level. He pulls* his legs up and

[11] Portions of this transcription are cited on pp. 7-8 of this paper.

lowers* himself on the beanbag. He moves* his whole head as his eyes go across the text. He seems completely oblivious to the activity in the room and to the camera itself. He is immersed in his reading.

(There are several activities going on at the same time Mitchell is reading. The teacher has a small group at a table taking a test. Karen, an instructional assistant, has another group of students with her--some reading, some using the computer, and others doing activities right at her feet. Other students in the class are working independently at various places in the room. There is a constant hum of noise. Occasionally, there is some computer noise.)

It is interesting that Mitchell is so absorbed in his reading. He is totally ignoring the other things going on around the room.

TC: (This is at odds with his behavior when not reading. At those other times, he is actively involved in whatever is going on. He is out of his seat whenever possible. He speaks out loud constantly. He seems to cause friction between himself and others, which he is quick to report.)

OC: As Mitchell is reading, he reaches* behind his back to scratch, but does not interrupt his reading. He never looks at the camera, but keeps his eyes focused on his book.

About halfway through the book, he shifts* to a reclining position on his right side without a pause in his reading. The group noise gets loud. He glances* up, settles* back, leaning against the beanbag, and continues reading.

Further into his reading, he scratches* his head, then* his nose, then sits* up straighter and rests against the beanbag, propped on his right elbow.

There is a disturbance when Jane doesn't want to go to work with Karen. The teacher says across the room: "Jane, she's your teacher, too. You have to go."
Jane quits complaining and goes to work with Karen.

Mitchell never looks up or misses a beat in his reading. He continues reading, seemingly totally absorbed in the story. He shifts* again, putting* his left knee up, his right arm* behind his head in a pillow-

fashion, holding* his book with his left hand. He never stops reading.

He pulls* his right arm forward to turn the page with both hands, rubs* his eye, glances* at the camera, leans* back with his head against the beanbag, the rest of his body stretched out on the floor, except his left knee, which is still bent and is used for propping up his book, which he holds *straight out in front of him with arms extended. He never stops reading.

He pauses, rubs* his eye, wrinkles* his nose, and resumes reading, sitting* up and shifting* onto his right elbow... still reading. He sighs, murmurs, "Ahhhh... long book," yawns*, leans back*, looks* at the camera, wiggles* his fingers at the camera in a friendly little wave, and continues reading. He slides* back down until everything is resting on the floor except his head and shoulders.

He shifts* again with his spine resting against the beanbag, head leaning forward and eyes down, looking at the book as he reads.

He pauses*, scratches* his head, shifts* again, resting his head against his shoulder on the beanbag with his right hand and arm behind his head. He quickly glances* out of the side of one eye twice* at the camera. He continues reading. He sits* up. He looks* at the camera. He lets* the book softly fall shut. He reaches* down and pulls* at his sock.

The teacher asks, "Mitchell, are you finished?"

He replies quietly, "Not yet... My foot's stuck!"

He keeps pulling* at his sock for a few more seconds. Then he quickly leans* back against the beanbag, resting on his right shoulder while reading.

He finally shifts* off of the beanbag entirely and now has his right elbow on the floor with his head resting* on his right hand. The book is on the floor. He is turning* pages with his left hand, having his left arm resting across his body. He raises* his head each time he turns a page.

He sits* up. He has not stopped reading aloud during all of the body shifting.

Suddenly, he sits* up straighter, looks* over his right shoulder to the teacher, who is working with a small group of students. He calls* out

❖ softly, "I'm done! Mrs. Cherry..."

The teacher says, "You're finished?"

♣ He nods* his head.

The teacher says, "OK, Jessica..."

✳ Mitchell glances* at the camera, gets up*, and quietly leaves* the beanbag and videotaping area.

OC: It has been amazing to see the amount of shifting and squirming Mitchell has done during his oral reading to the camera. But, amazingly, none of the body activity seems to have interfered with his processing of

✪ the print. He was actively involved in his reading. He had few miscues, but self-corrected those that he did have. He was able to retell the story completely to the teacher following his reading to the camera.

(It is easy to see why the right knee of his jeans is much more worn

❤ than his left knee... It gets a much greater workout!)

TC: I have a better appreciation for Mitchell's need for movement after

➤ watching his video[12]. I did not realize that activity was quite so necessary to him until I observed him never completely still, though thoroughly absorbed in his reading. He simply does not seem to be able to stop having some part of his body in constant motion. It is apparent that even when he

➳ is most involved in his task, he must be allowed the freedom to move something!

As I look back to the times he has been most disruptive, I think it is possibly because of the restriction of movement or noise at those particular times. This is especially apparent during a large-group activity or lesson. It is noticeable that he almost constantly interrupts whoever is speaking to the group; he just can not seem to refrain from responding aloud or moving to a position from which he can see more clearly.

I will try to position him directly in front of whatever activity I want to have him most involved in. I will start observing Mitchell specifically to watch for other instances of involvement and look for patterns of behavior.

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[12] It is interesting to note that there were 56 specific instances of Mitchell's movement in the transcription of his video; some movements were very tiny, others large, but movement nonetheless.

APPENDIX C

A TYPICAL STUDENT INTERVIEW[13]

Interview/Conference with Don
Student
March 8, 1994
9:30 a.m. - 9:45 a.m.

Teacher: Don, have you got something you want to say next? OK, come on.

(Don comes to sit with the teacher at the interview table.)

Teacher: OK, Don, what would you like to tell me... about school... Is there anything?

Don: Yeah.

Teacher: OK, what?

Don: About the math...

Teacher: Tell me about the math. What do you want to tell me about it?

Don: Sometimes it just gets totally confusing... It seems like one thing seems the same thing as the other... but they're really not the same thing...

(He is referring to solving complicated word problems.)

Teacher: You have to read very carefully, don't you?

Don: Um, hum... And you just have to find a place to stop...

Teacher: Do you want to say anything about reading?

Don: Yeah...

Teacher: ... or writing? ... What?

Don: Reading is sometimes hard... when you've gotta think about what it is you don't know... You just have to sound it out or just go by and find out what the sense means anyway...

Teacher: OK. What kinds of things do you do to figure out when you don't know a word?

Don: Well, I try to think and see what it <u>might</u> be... and then if I can't find out, I just skip the word and I'll go to another one...

Teacher: OK. Do you use clues from around it in the story or maybe pictures?

Don: I sometimes do.

Teacher: All right. Tell me how you feel about doing projects.

Don: I like it sometimes, but sometimes when I start getting another person in the project, they think that I do it too slow... but, really, I'm just trying to help them do it slow 'cause usually when they go to another team and

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[13] A portion of this interview is cited on pp. 56-57 of this paper.

they're doing it really fast, it doesn't really come out all that well... so I kind of do it slow...

Teacher: You'd rather do it slow and do it right?

Don: Uh, huh. Than do it fast and only get it halfway done...

Teacher: Who do you work best with when you work with partners?

Don: Hmmm, probably Sam... Mark... Ralph... I really don't get along with Beth all that well when we do a project...

Teacher: That's because ya'll have worked so closely together all the time... You're just kind of thrown together too much, maybe...

Don: Uh, hum... Sometimes... And I like having another person work with me instead of just sitting with everybody the whole time, again and again... It gets boring... so I kind of change around...

Teacher: OK. Tell me about the computer, 'cause you do so well on the computer...

Don: Sometimes it gets a little hard on the new games. Sometimes it seems like... but after a while after you have those new games on... it seems like we want more... If they've seen that game a few times, they want more. Sometimes I think you might think that you wish you never even had the computer! (Laughs.)

Teacher: (Laughs, too.) Ahhh, Naaa... I like the computer...
Let's see... What about... How do you like to work best when you come in? Do you want to get done with what I tell you you have to do first?

Don: I like getting done with what you tell me to do first... and I usually work alone. I don't like working with other people 'cause sometimes they kind of bother me... talking to me and stuff like that... it kind of bothers me...

Teacher: Um, hum... I've noticed that you choose to work in your desk a lot... and do it by yourself... All right... you don't really like it when you're interrupted and you have to be pulled to a group in the middle of your own work, do you?

Don: No.

Teacher: Tell me why?

Don: 'Cause then I feel like I'm not going to have much more time to work. I feel like I have to get it done very fast, and ... it's kind of hard...

Teacher: ...It makes it harder on you when you have interruptions?

Don: Uh, huh.

Teacher: I know the feeling. I feel the same way sometimes.

Don: Sometimes kids always come over, even if I'm working, they usually come over. They ask me, "Don, how do I do this... how do I do this?"

(Don is referring to using the computer. Any student who has a problem on the computer invariably looks for him first, then Beth, then if all else fails, they approach me for help. They appear to like having peer help best.)

Teacher: Why do you think that is? Why do you think they choose to come ask you?

Don: Probably because they know that I've been working on it a long time... and they know that I've been able to know how to do it very well 'cause you've shown me a lot about it... and I've learned on it... They probably just think that maybe I'll know... But I think it would be better for you to have two people that would be on that computer, 'cause if one's already done, the other one would probably be still working.

Teacher: OK. So it might not be such a struggle for you to have to help with it if there were somebody else?

Don: Yeah. Some help.

Teacher: How do you feel about getting to go to the library and work on the CD ROM?

Don: It's pretty fun. Sometimes it gets a little bit boring... and sometimes I like a little time there alone... And I like helping other people learn how to do it, too. By the way, Mrs. Cherry, we haven't gone there much lately...

Teacher: I know it. I don't think Mrs. Morrow is here.

Don: Naaa... I think maybe she's on vacation?...

(Mrs. Morrow, the librarian, is a member of a SACS accreditation team for another school and has been out several days in a row lately. She does not allow the CD ROM to be used when she is not at school.)

Teacher: Well, I don't think she is. She had to go to another school last week and that's the reason she wasn't here... but maybe she'll be back tomorrow... As soon as she's back I'll let you go back and work... Do you have anything else you want to say?

Don: There's one thing I want to say about writing...

Teacher: OK. Good. What?

Don: It's hard... and there's one thing about it that's really hard... We always have to go back over it and write on it again and write on it again...

(Teacher bursts out laughing because it has been a struggle to teach the class to edit their work.)

Don: ... After you [I] look at it so many times you [I] say, "Uh, oh. I left out a

period. Uh, oh. I left some words out. Oh, no. I didn't make sense."

Teacher: Do you like to go back and edit your own stories... fix them to make sense?

Don: Yeah.

Teacher: (Surprised.) You do?

Don: I... I do.

Teacher: You <u>didn't</u> like to do that at the beginning of the year, though, did you?

Don: No, not really. It was kind of starting to get kind of boring... But then after a while, after I read a lot of books, I thought it was kind of fun to do it!

Teacher: You're learning what grown-up authors do. They have to go back and read what they wrote and fix their mistakes, too.

Don: I already have another idea for a book that...

Teacher: Oh! That you will write?

Don: Yeah, but I'll give it to another person to see if they would like to write it. I think it might be funny, but it might not.

Teacher: Do you want to tell me?

Don: I want to write "The Stupids Meet the Smarts."

Teacher: Oh, what a good book...

Don: Where the Smarts meet Stupids... people who are smart meet people who are stupid...

Teacher: Like those Stupids books that we read? Do you think you could create a book like that?

Don: Probably.

Teacher: Would you like that to be your next project?

Don: Yeah!

Teacher: I would like that, too.

Don: I would... but I'd like to kind of work with other people...

Teacher: That would be great! You choose a team to help you work on that.

Don: Yeah. I'll choose the best team I can find...

Teacher: OK. And I'll give you time to do that...

Don: OK.

Teacher: That would be a <u>wonderful</u> project...

Don: Um, hum...

Teacher: All right. Great! Thanks!

OBSERVER COMMENT:

Don leaves the table to gather up a group to begin working on his project immediately. He chooses Beth, Jessica, Mark, Tina, and Bob to work with them. They push two trapezoidal tables together to form a large workspace in the middle of the room, gather their materials, and begin working. One of the students, Jessica, asks if they can choose a photographer to get a shot of them as they begin working. I tell her that they can. She goes to Don to have him pick the photographer. He chooses Ralph. They return to the table to begin their project. There is a period of negotiation in which Don acts as leader and ultimate decision-maker, but all students on this project team have input, and all end up with responsibility for a task. Several times during the project various students come tome to show me what they are doing. Mark comes to me several times to show me why he has been chosen to illustrate the cover page. He says he's good at drawing the silly things the Stupids have out in the front of their house. He points out several silly aspects of the mailbox, the house itself, etc. He is very pleased with his contribution to the group. This group continues working right until the minute we leave for lunch. They are not finished and want to know if they can work some more when they return from lunch. I assure them that I will give them more time later in the afternoon. We agree that they may leave their materials on the table. I announce to the class that they are not to move anything on the team's project table. We leave for lunch.

APPENDIX D

SAMPLES OF STUDENT WRITINGS

Accidental Success 14

(Letter writing experiences to the lunchroom supervisor sparked appreciative attitudes in students.)

801 Main Street
Meadows AL 35000
October 13 1993

dear Mrs. Storey
I likes going around
the lunchroom. I liked
it when you opened
the freezer. I never
now that they was a
refrigerator that
big.

Love,
Bob

Translation:
Dear Mrs. Storey,
I liked going around the lunchroom. I liked it when you opened the freezer. I never knew that the[re] was a refrigerator that big.
Love,
Bob

801 Main Street
Meadows AL 35000
October 7 1993

Dear Mrs. Storey,
I went to be a kocre
like you will you teach me
Dear Mrs. Storey.

Love,
Robert

Translation:
Dear Mrs. Storey:
I want to be a cook[er] like you. Will you teach me, Dear Mrs. Storey?
Love,
Robert
(Picture is Mrs. Storey teaching Robert to cook pizza!)

[14] These letters are referred to on p. 30 of this paper.

Accidental Success...

This letter of appreciation is referred to on p. 30 of the text.

801 Main Street
Meadow, AL 35000
October 15, 1993

Dear Mrs. Roberts,
Thank you for coming to our class. I learned a lot. I may grow up and be a principal and be just like you. Because I like working with kids.

Love,
Don

801 Main Street
Meadow, AL 35000
October 22, 1993

Dear Mrs. Moore,
I hope you enjoyed me being here, I enjoyed it. I had a lot of fun. I hope that I get you next year. I'm glad I got to come today.

Love,
Beth

801 Main Street
Meadow, AL 35000
October 22, 1993

Dear Mrs. Moore,
Thank you for letting us come to your class. We really enjoyed it. I hope we can come here again.

Love,
Don

Community Effort Persists... Even When the Community is Physically Apart![15]

(Letter writing experiences to the classroom teacher who allowed my students to work in her classroom for the day when I attended a photography workshop.)

[15] These letters are referred to on p. 31 of this paper.

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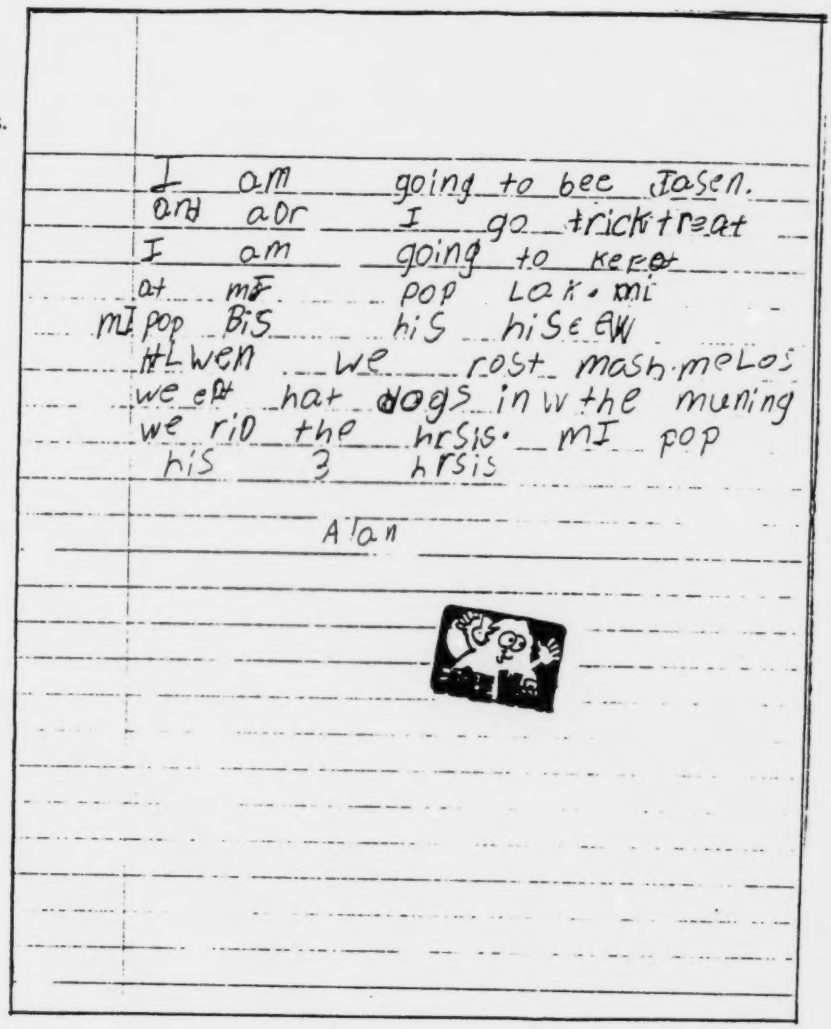
Special Day Celebrations[16]

(These stories conveyed thought and showed enthusiasm for an experience.)

Translation:
I am going to be Jason,
and before I go trick-or-treat[ing]
I am going to camp out
at my Pawpaw's lake. My
Pawpaw buys his horses every
Halloween. We roast marshmallows.
We eat hot dogs. In the morning
we ride the horses. My Pawpaw
has three horses.


I am going to bee Jasen.
and aor I go trick r treat
I am going to kepe
at mF pop Lak. mi
mI pop BiS his hiSe eW
#Lwen we rost mash meLos
we eft hat dogs in w the muning
we rid the hrSis. mI pop
his 3 hrsis
Alan

[16] The following two stories are referred to on p. 33 of this paper.

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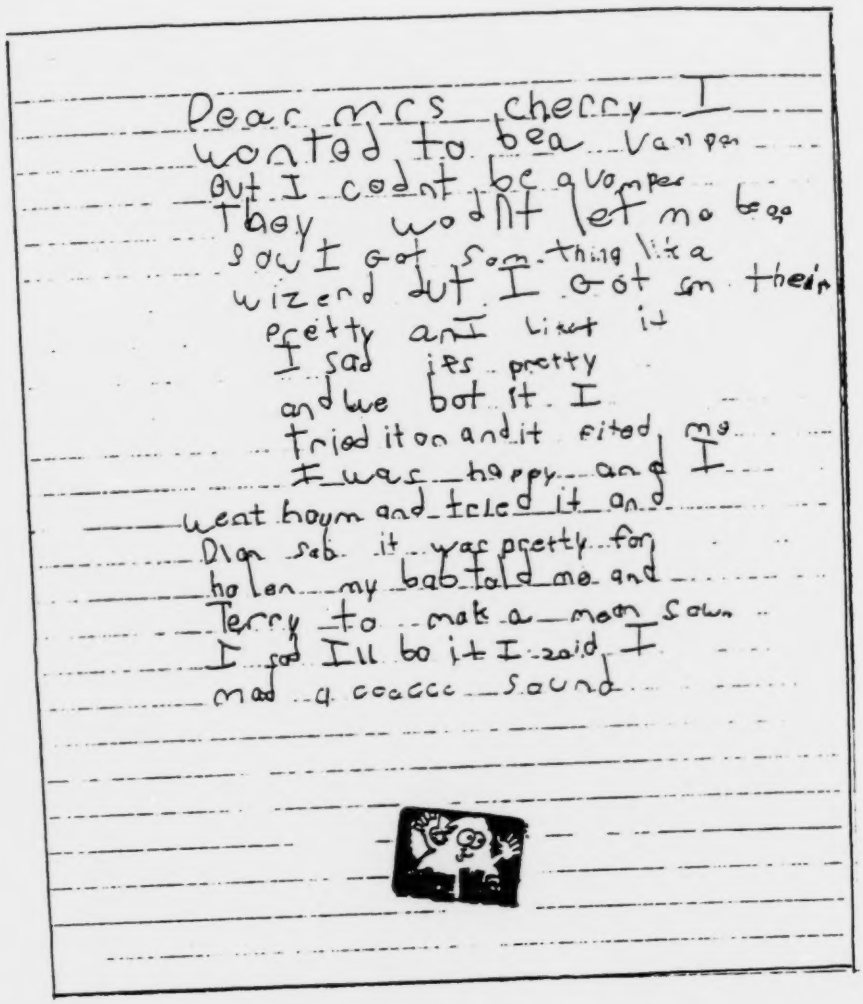
Dear mrs cherry I
wanted to bea vampr
but I codnt be a vampr
They wodnt let me be
so I got som thing like a
wizerd but I got sm thein
pretty and I likt it
I sad its pretty
and we bot it I
tried it on and it fited me
I was happy and I
went hoym and tcld it an
Dian sab it was pretty for
halen my bab tald me and
Terry to mak a mean sown
I sad Ill do it I said I
mad a cccccc sound

Translation:[17]

Dear Mrs. Cherry,

I wanted to be a vampire, but I couldn't be a vampire. They wouldn't let me be one. So I got something like a wizard. But I got something pretty, and I like it. I said, "It's pretty," and we bought it. I tried it on and it fit[ted] me. I was happy, and I went home and tried it. And Diane said it was pretty for Halloween. My dad told me and Terry to make a mean sound. I said, "I'll do it," I said. I made a[n] "o-o-o-o-o-o" sound.

[17] Jane's story is referred to on p. 33 of this paper.

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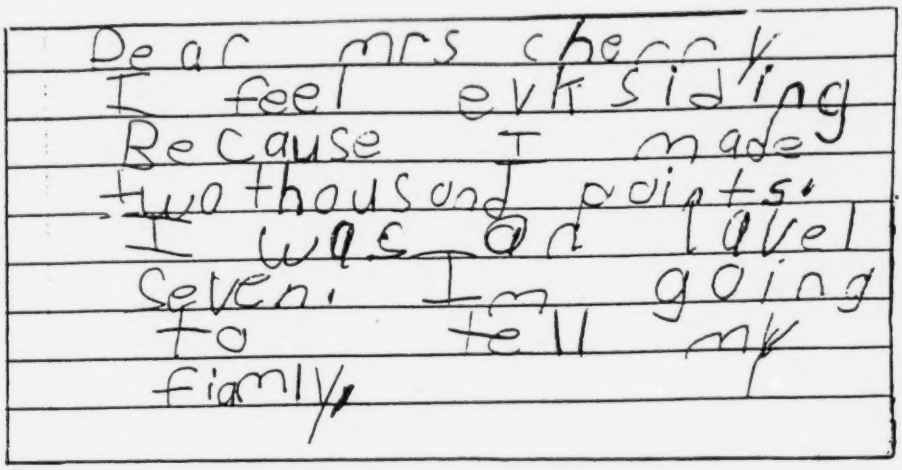
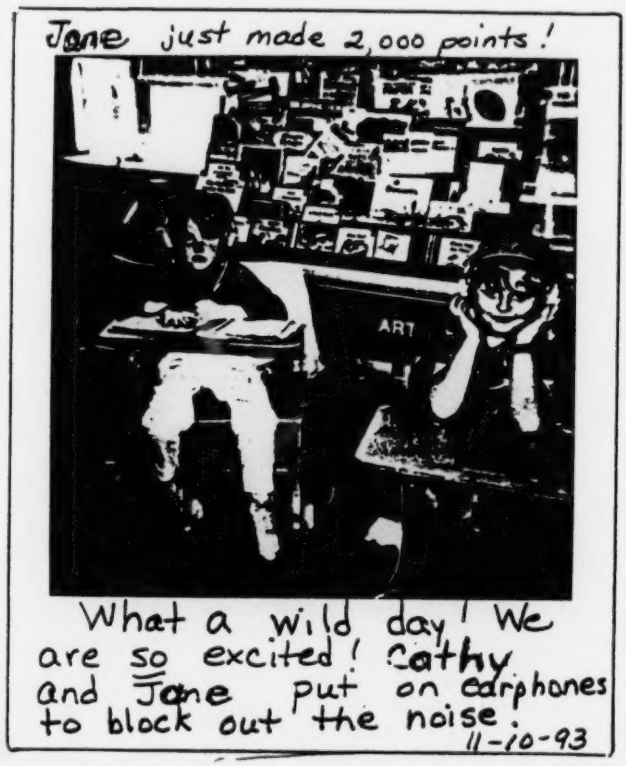
A Special Case[18]

(Jane was an unusual case. To more fully appreciate this effort, refer to the text, pp. 41-42.)

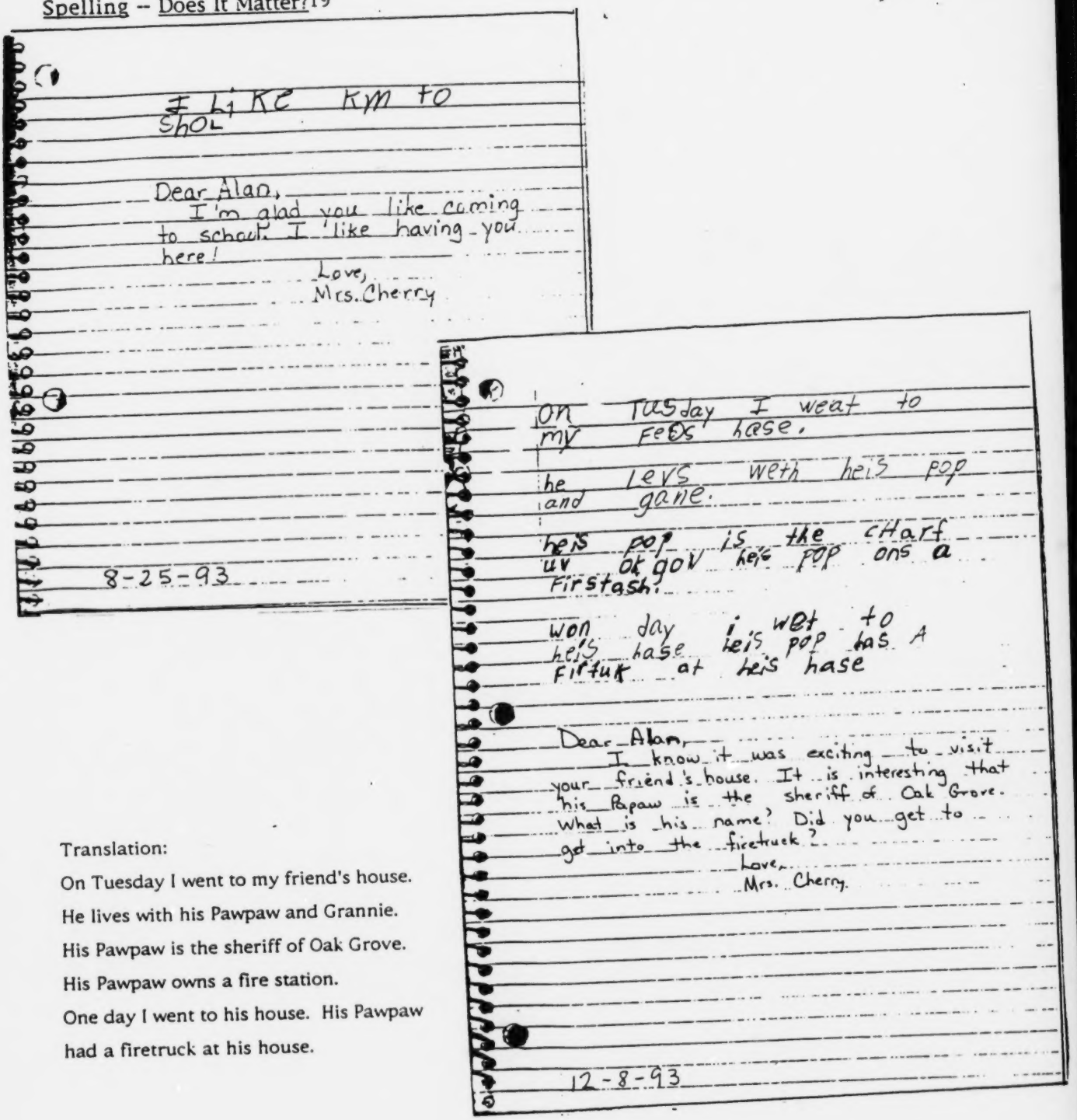


Translation:
Dear Mrs. Cherry,
I feel excited
because I made
two thousand points.
I was on level
seven. I'm going
to tell my
family.


Jane just made 2,000 points!
ART
What a wild day! We are so excited! Cathy and Jane put on earphones to block out the noise.
11-10-93

[18] This story and photo are referred to on pp. 41-42 and again on pp. 69-70 of this paper.

Spelling -- Does It Matter?[19]



I like km to shol

Dear Alan,
I'm glad you like coming to schaul. I like having you here!
Love,
Mrs. Cherry

8-25-93

On Tusday I weat to my Feds hase.
he levs weth heis pop and gane.
heis pop is the cHarf uv ok gov
heis pop ons a Firstash.
won day i wet to heis hase heis pop has A Firtuk at heis hase

Dear Alan,
I know it was exciting to visit your friend's house. It is interesting that his Papaw is the sheriff of Oak Grove. What is his name? Did you get to get into the firetruck?
Love,
Mrs. Cherry

12-8-93

Translation:

On Tuesday I went to my friend's house.
He lives with his Pawpaw and Grannie.
His Pawpaw is the sheriff of Oak Grove.
His Pawpaw owns a fire station.
One day I went to his house. His Pawpaw had a firetruck at his house.

[19] These two journal entries are referred to on pp. 54-55 of this paper.

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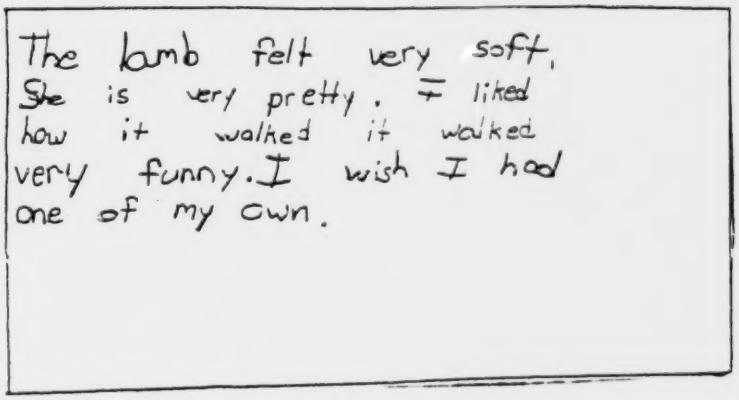
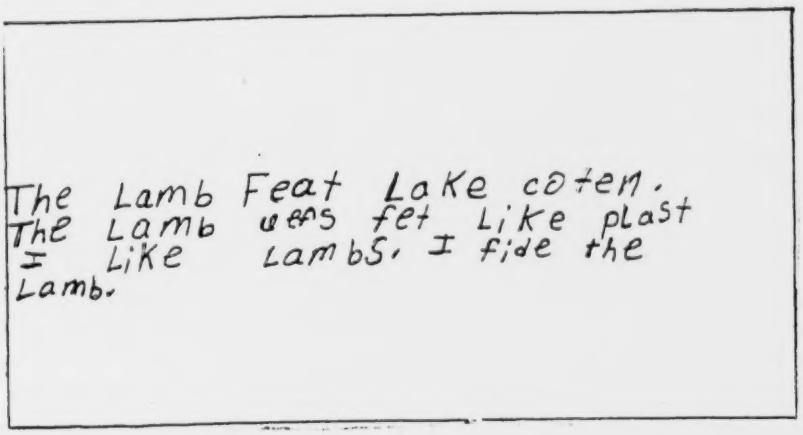
Writing: When Is It Too Much?[20]

Beth's Draft (No translation necessary)



Alan's Draft Translation:

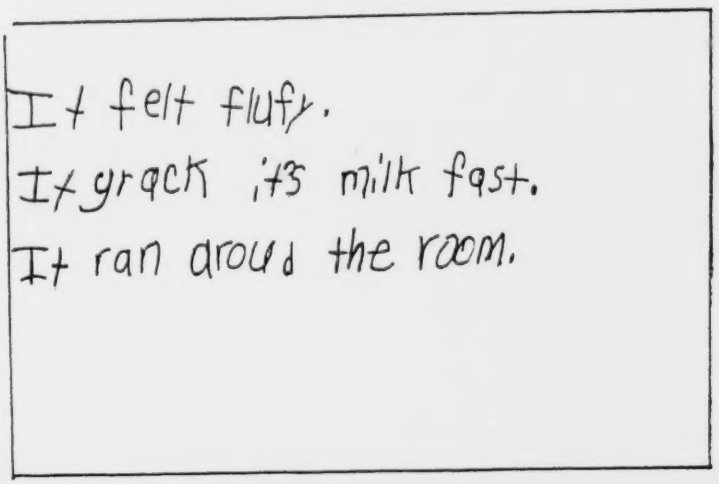
The lamb felt like cotton.
The lamb's hooves felt like plastic.
I like lambs. I fed the lamb.



Bob's Draft Translation:

It felt fluffy.
It drank its milk fast.
It ran around the room.

(Bob's speech impediment influences his writing. He writes exactly the way he speaks.)



[20] These three quick drafts and photos on the next page are referred to on pp. 57-58 of this paper.

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Writing: When Is It Too Much? (Continued)[21]

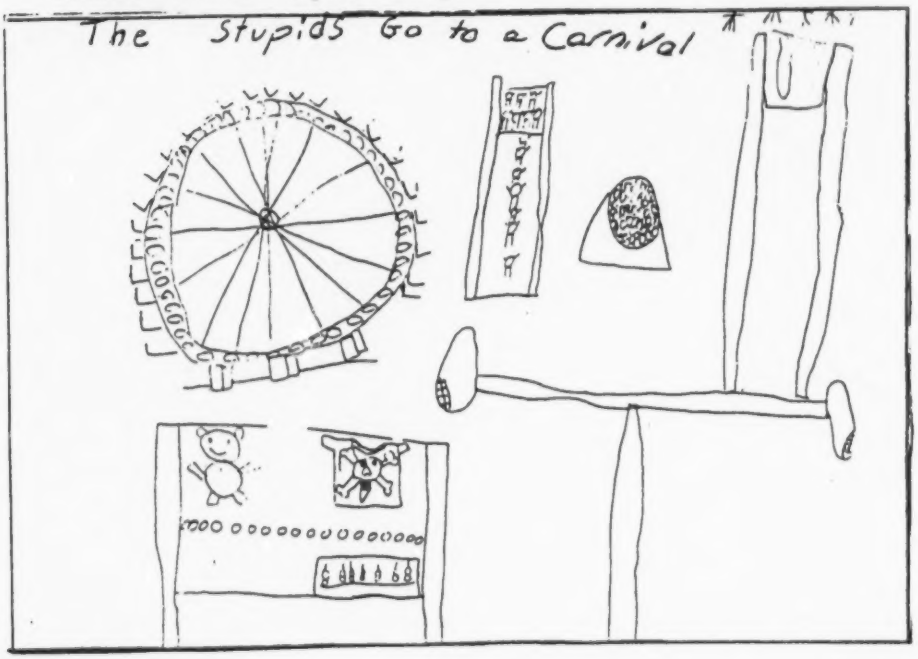
Bethany brought her lamb to our class. The lamb was eager to explore the room.

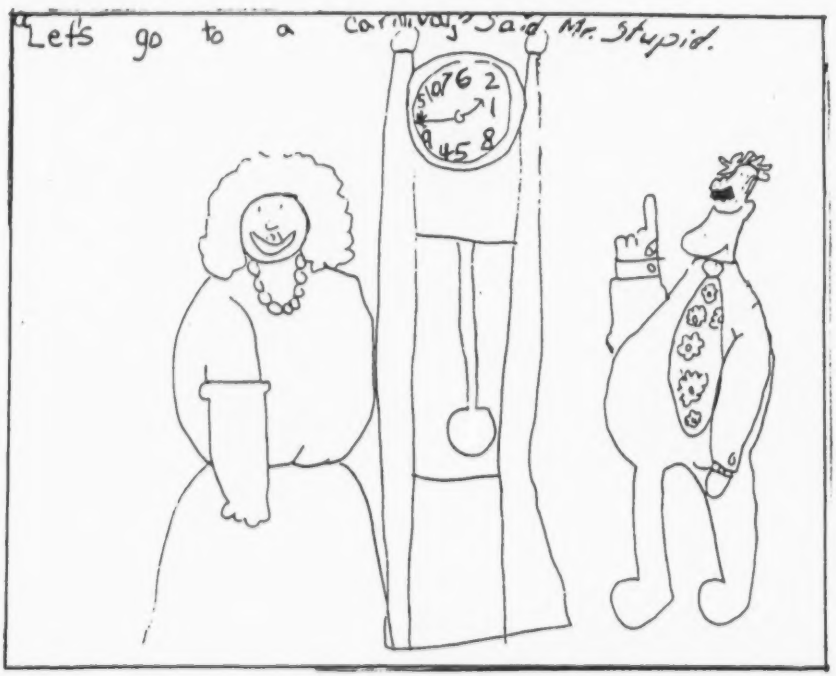
Alan pets the lamb while Bethany holds it and Cathy feeds the two-week-old baby. Ralph looks up at Jane as she reaches to pet the lamb.

[21]These two photos are referred to on pp. 57-58 of this paper.

Silliness Becomes Productive[22]

These two pages are part of a book written by students in which they explore writing through silliness with the "Stupids" family.





[22] These two pages are referred to on pp. 75-77 of this paper.

APPENDIX E
SAMPLE POLAROID SNAPSHOTS

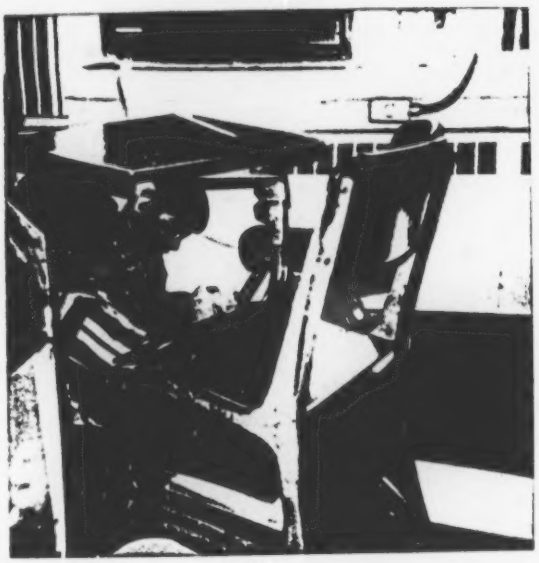


PHOTO #1

Mitchell and Robert create a private corner as they complete their assignments. (See description on p. 68-69, A Choice to Learn.)

PHOTO #2

John, Bob, and Tom share favorite parts of Shel Silverstein's poetry with me at the project table. (See description on pp. 74-75, Poetry, Laughter, and Good Feelings.)

Achievement Celebration[23]

PHOTO #3

Tom reads Where The Wild Things Are to Miss Johnston. (Photo by Carol.)

PHOTO #4

Tom reads to Mrs. Vaughn's kindergarten class. (Photo by Alan.)

DRAWING #1

Alan drew this picture of himself taking a picture of Tom reading to the kindergarten children!

[23] These pictures and the drawing are referred to on pp. 38-39 of this paper.

Fifth-Grade Partners Just Won't Quit[24]

Chris records Ralph's reading in his reading diary. Cord listens as Tom reads to him.

Cathy reads to Betsy; Mark reads to Misty; Ralph reads to Chris; Alan reads to Thomas.

Robert reads to Davis; Jessica reads to Andy; Jane reads to Christie; Beth reads to Theresa.

Bob made a necklace of beads and leather for his partner, Bill. Both of them feel good about it!

[24] These pictures are referred to on pp. 39-40 of this paper.

At almost any time of the day we could be found enjoying books --
by ourselves, or with our friends!

One of our favorite books to share together was Chicken Soup With Rice!

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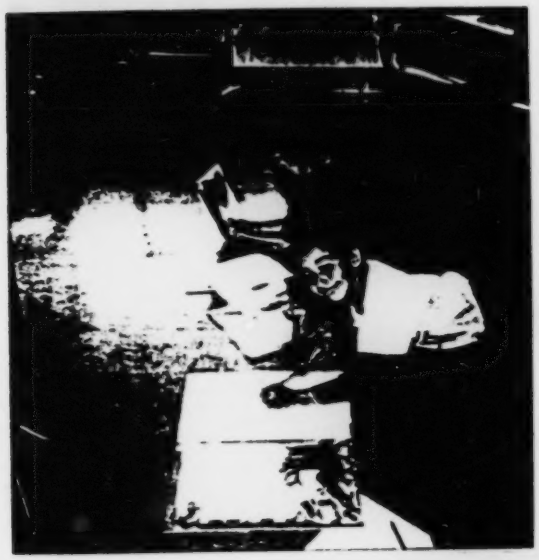
Whether we worked alone...

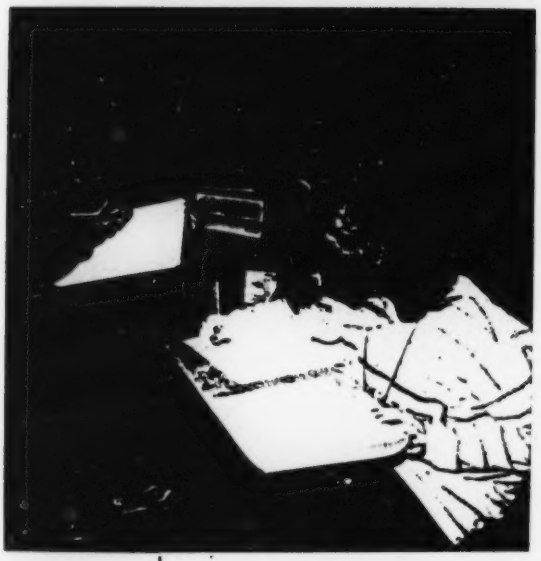
Creating our own books...



Writing about
books we read...

Looking for information to
help us with our projects...

Or whether we were together...



Talking about our ideas...

Writing Workshop
Mini Lesson
10-27-93

Discussing a lesson...

Laughing at Don's magic tricks...

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Through it all...

We were BEST of friends!

APPENDIX F

"INSIDER" VIEW:

CONVERSATION/INTERVIEW WITH ONE CLASSROOM ASSISTANT25

Conversation/Interview with Karen
Classroom Instructional Assistant
March 8, 1994
8:45 a.m. - 9:15 a.m.

Teacher: What have you observed in the area of reading, writing, learning, attitudes about school, behavior... anything that you've observed, negative or positive?

Karen: As far as the whole group or...?

Teacher: Well, anything you want to say.

Karen: OK. I think that the whole group has worked out better than I... than I really thought. I didn't think that it would work -- letting them choose to sit in their seat or to sit in the floor. I really didn't think it would work, because I thought it had to be more structured.

Teacher: Because you are a very structured person yourself.

Karen: Yes.

Teacher: And you really like having that structure?

Karen: Yeah. I like knowing what I'm going to do from one minute to the next. And from coming in here and then going into some of the other rooms that are structured, I can see that the children are happier in here than in the other classes.

Teacher: Really?

Karen: Yes.

Teacher: What do you think contributes to that happiness?

Karen: Being able to choose, to make choices...

Teacher: So you think choices are the major thing?

Karen: Yes... because they are going to have to make choices all of their life... and they're learning at an early age to make choices. They can either make choices and be rewarded or they can make choices and be punished.

Teacher: What kind of rewards are you talking about?

Karen: Having extra activities -- fun activities -- getting to do centers -- getting to work on the computer more -- If they do their work, they know they're going to have extra time to do stuff that they really enjoy. So if they're sitting in their desks or if they're lying in the floor, they know that work has got to be done, so they're -- they're making a choice.

Teacher: OK. What do you notice about behavior?

Karen: Most of the behavior is better. I don't hear you having to get onto them as much as I do in the other classes... and I think it's because the other classes are so structured they... they feel like

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25 This conversation/interview demonstrates Karen's radical, almost "about-face" change of opinion concerning this literacy learning environment and way of processing since the beginning of the school year. She makes valid suggestions for the future. An excerpt from this interview may be found on p. 64 of the body of this study.

they've got to be in their seats.... they've got to be at the center they're supposed to be at – whereas you're sort of giving them liberty. That goes back to making the choice on whether they act up or whether they don't.

Teacher: All right. What about food in the classroom? How do you feel about that?

Karen: I was optimistic about that! But I think when it's something that... when it's shared... like... when you bring stuff for all of them, I think that's better... because most of the time the kids that usually bring something have eaten breakfast anyway, and then a lot of the ones that haven't eaten breakfast, you know...

Teacher: May be the ones that...

Karen: Yeah...

Teacher: ...need to have it...

OK, um...

Karen: I think that's a good idea. They enjoy it, and it wasn't disruptive like you'd think it would be, because I've even brought food too, you know, that I've passed out to them. And they like it. I even tried it in other classrooms, giving them something when they come back in my groups. I got permission from the teachers, and the kids love it.

Teacher: OK. Do you think it affects how they work:?

Karen: Oh, yeah, yeah.

Teacher: I do, too. I think for some people it makes a real difference.

Karen: It sure does.

Teacher: Let's see...

Karen: ...'Cause I snack at home a lot of times when I'm reading or watching TV...

Teacher: I do, too. It's a big thing for me. If I'm really doing something difficult, I'm eating something! OK, um... Think about some of the things we talked about on the way to Sedley School or on the way back. Gosh, I wish I had written it down or had had a tape player that day! (Teachers and instructional assistants observed in a model school for one-half day earlier.)

Karen: Yeah, we should've remembered...

Teacher: Can you think about differences besides just structure... like in valuing or not valuing effort... looking for everything to be exactly correct or taking effort on the way toward correctness?

Karen: Yeah, I think that this way even with pulling them up in small groups, when I pull them up, you can really tell the ones that are... that need the extra help... the effort is better because they're really trying their very best... and you know that they're trying their very best...

Teacher: Do you have difficulty with anybody, um, "balking" when they come to work with you?

Karen: At first I did... one child.

Teacher: What kinds of things happened and who was it?

Karen: It was Alan... and he really had a bad attitude, and I think it was because he didn't want to leave his work at the center he was working at... you know... I think it's because he didn't want to leave his work. He wanted his work completed before he stopped... Uh, he's really slow about... when you call him... He's real slow about getting to where you need him... Uh, but his attitude has changed. The kids love coming now, because after we started the highlighting

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they really started enjoying it better because that was making them feel like they were big... you know, doing something... and even Mrs. Roberts came in and made the statement to them that she didn't know how to highlight until she got in college... and they're learning it in second grade... so I think that's going to be something they'll use from now on... and they'll remember that they learned it here.

Teacher: I think that's a good thing. I can see a difference in some of the things they're doing in other areas because they've learned to do that with you.

Karen: Well, even in some of the upper grades, they don't know how to highlight... They don't know how to read and go back and highlight the answers in the story... I've found that out in some other groups.

Teacher: So are you carrying any of this over in any of your other classes?

Karen: Most all of my other classes... especially the same grade level classes, I am.

Teacher: OK. Are there any similarities or differences in this classroom and others? I'm not... I don't want names called or anything like that, but, um... How many other second grade classrooms do you work in, two?

Karen: One.

Teacher: One?

Karen: One, and then a third grade... They're both completely different. There are no similarities... None at all... They're both structured... They're both, um... It's not... I do the same type reading group in my second and third grade rooms, but the teacher doesn't do like you do... I mean, it's not, uh...

Teacher: All right. They're more structured in their approach to their classrooms?

Karen: Yes.

Teacher: Ah, do they expect their children to be more structured in what they're getting into?

Karen: Uh, huh.

Teacher: OK.

Karen: They go to the basal.

Teacher: What kind of differences can you see?

Karen: I can see that the children do not enjoy reading as much because they know when you get that basal reader... they know... we're going to either read the same story over they've read once or twice or even three times... Even taking taped reading in, they don't enjoy it as much because they've already read that story two or three times... And even when you work on the skills... even if I review the skills that the teacher's already taught the children, they're just bored with it. They like for me to bring the storyteller books that we've taped because they've never heard it.

Teacher: So you think attitude... the children's attitude... makes a difference?

Karen: Yes.

Teacher: As well...

Karen: Yes, and that affects their learning... They don't care to read that same story two or three times... They want something different just like we do.

Teacher: OK. You're kind of seeing the same things that I'm seeing... I'm seeing that choice makes a tremendous difference. I'm seeing that valuing people, liking them, liking what they do, and accepting mistakes, is really important to learning... And that if the children can have a good attitude, then they'll do what they are supposed to do.

Karen: Yeah. And even with me working with just Chapter I, you know, the other kids want to come and highlight and read. You know, they see that the Chapter I children are having so much fun that that's what they want to do.

Teacher: So they're looking on that as a positive experience for those kids...

Karen: Yeah.

Teacher: ...that get to come work with you...

Karen: Yeah. So I think choice... choices make the difference in all of it. I think that if the other teachers could sit in on a class like yours... it would probably take them a couple of weeks to really see the difference because it did with me... you know.

Teacher: It's not something that you observe every time you come in. You can't sit in here for thirty minutes and see what's going on...

Karen: No. No, you sure can't. You have to be in here for several weeks to really see the difference.

Teacher: Can you tell... What kind of differences can you tell in what the kids could do at the beginning of the year and what they can do now?

Karen: Ah, a tremendous difference... because we had children that could not even read the simplest words... we had children that could... are unable to do phonics... but they are reading and they're not doing it in phonics style... any more... like that was so pushed... and it's still being pushed in a lot of the classes... so we're just teaching them to read... you know, to listen to a taped story and to go back and read...

Teacher: Read for meaning...

Karen: Yeah. They enjoy being read <u>to</u>. And you can read something <u>to</u> them... they're understanding it more.

Teacher: Uh, huh...

Karen: Even the first time that you read it to them... and I think that's going to make a big difference in the SAT because you can only read it one time, so I think that being able to read to them one time... We're teaching them to get the main... the facts... just focus on the facts and ideas in that story... a lot of the things don't matter... and I think that's what's going to help bring those SAT scores up.

Teacher: I'm beginning to feel a little better about SAT... I feel like their reading has increased so much that they're bound to do better... just because they'll be able to read what they're doing.

Karen: Yeah. Children are very frustrated if they can't read... and they hide it. They hide it from the teacher, and they hide it from the other children, because they're embarrassed about it.

Teacher: I think that's part of the problem with Alan.

Karen: Yeah.

Teacher: ...because he does have to struggle...

Karen: But he's <u>*improved*</u>... and Robert has improved tremendously.

Teacher: I am really tickled with Ralph's writing because it makes such good sense... what he says...

Karen: I think if they had been in another class... I know this is just a... I guess, a trial... program for you, isn't it, this year?

Teacher: Well, I'm going into it in a lot more depth than I ever have before.

Karen: Well, I think that had these children been in another classroom to where they couldn't choose, to where they wouldn't have had the liberty to read something other than the basal reader, they would not be as far along as they are.

Teacher: I am saying that probably 70% of this class would be at risk in a traditional classroom.

Karen: Oh, I think so, too. And I think every teacher... I think any teacher that used this approach could make a difference in the children... you know, but it's going to take a while.

Teacher: Would you be willing to say that to an administrator?

Karen: Yes.

Teacher: When this gets written up?

Karen: Yes. I think that every teacher should try this because there are so many children with so many different learning styles and this is just... this has just worked out real good...

Teacher: Well, teachers have learning styles, too...

Karen: Yes...

Teacher: And some people can't... like you and I are very different in our... we're alike in some ways, but, you really <u>do</u> like structure...

Karen: Yeah, I do...

Teacher: And so, would this not bother you if <u>you</u> were running a classroom? As a structured person, what would you do different than the way I do it?

Karen: Um...

Teacher: You would do a lot of things different...

Karen: Yeah... I <u>would</u> do a lot of things different... But now that I've seen the way that you <u>do</u> it, I would do a lot of things <u>like</u> you've done it. Even though I am a structured person, you know...

Teacher: This used to drive you crazy when I was first learning how to do this...

Karen: Yeah! (Laughing) It did! It really did... and I thought, "These kids are going to be so far behind at the end of the year"... (Teacher and Karen laugh together)... "We're going to be in bad shape in this room!" Which... we're ahead, I think, of all the other second grade classrooms...

Teacher: Do you really?

Karen: Uh, huh. I think so. I think this class is really going to knock the top off the test simply because we've just... I think so... Yeah, I would have said, "No, this is never going to work...."

Teacher: I know that...

Karen: I am <u>not</u>...

Teacher: You don't like...

Karen: I mean, everything's got to be in order... I can't stand confusion in the classroom, you know... but...

Teacher: (Laughing) I <u>knew</u> that...

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Karen: (laughing) I think all desks need to be in a row... They don't need to be scattered everywhere... I probably wouldn't be as junky... (Teacher and Karen break up laughing at the disorder evident in the room as the children work on their projects)... I'd probably be able to get to the back of the room to set the clock! (Laughs some more)

Teacher: (laughs uproariously!) I <u>can't</u>!

Karen: (Still laughing) No, you can't... 'cause the day I stayed in here, and I thought, how did she ever get to the clock? When the time changes, you're just going to be in a bad shape! (More laughter) No, I would have said it wouldn't work, but that just goes to show that even as adults we learn... and I've learned that this works with kids... Structure is not necessarily...

Teacher: I think choice is really important... but I also think liking the kids and liking what you do...

Karen: Oh, yeah...

Teacher: ...that is just as important as choice...

Karen: I think being able to have the liberty to say... like when you give me my lesson plans and you say, "Now, here's a stack of stuff... you can choose whatever you want to from this..." That gives me freedom to feel like I'm capable of doing what, you know, what I need to do, and yet we're still getting the job done. I think having the liberty to come in and work with you has... has really taught me a lot.

Teacher: I feel like I... that's called "autonomy"... when you take charge of your own learning... or you make your own decisions about what you think is important... you know, and I think adults have to do that as well as children...

Karen: Yeah, I think so, too. And that's just like children have to learn it to... you know, have to learn it early... I think they have to learn to make choices, but I think they also get... need to know that they can... sometimes there has to be choice, but sometimes they can do both. You know, sometimes...

Teacher: ...They have to do what they're told to do...

Karen: That's right... They have to do what they're told to do... but I have seen it work, and if I were going into teaching, I'd want to do my student teaching with you... (Teacher and Karen burst out laughing)... even if I did have to clean up the room! (More laughter)

Teacher: (Laughing) Ahhhh... that's funny!
Oh, do you have any other comments for me?

Karen: No... Other than I have seen it work...

Teacher: All right, can you see?... What I would like to do with all this... I want to impact my children that I'm working with in my classroom. I would also like to share some of these things that I think really work with other teachers, and I don't really know how to go about that... I mean, I don't think you just go out and "toot your own horn"...

Karen: Yeah, you don't want to offend anybody...
(Mitchell comes up and asks to go to the hall to get a drink of water. He is told that he can.)

Teacher: Now, that's one child who needs a lot of freedom, movement freedom... but actually, I watched him on the video read a book to the camera, and that child was not distracted by <u>anything</u> that was going on around him. He <u>read</u> beautifully. It was amazing to me. It kind of changed my

idea about how I perceived his ability when I watched that tape.

Karen: Hmmm.

Teacher: You know, if you stand back as an observer and choose one child and really watch what they're doing...

Karen: Uh, huh...

Teacher: ...it's really interesting.

Karen: I think if you wanted to share this with other teachers, they would probably be like me... (Laughs)

Teacher: They wouldn't... I don't think many people would just...

Karen: I don't think they would just say, "Well, OK, I'm changing my class. This is what we're going to do"...

Teacher: It's not an easy thing to change...

Karen: No, it's not...

Teacher: I even struggle... As much as I believe in it, I really struggled with how to do it... and I'm trying to specifically remember what I did that... I think one thing was trying to really build community at the beginning of school...

Karen: Yeah...

Teacher: ...when we did that book about "Celebrations"... when we started looking for good things to put in there about people and started appreciating each other...

Karen: Uh, huh...

Teacher: ...and wrote about it a lot...

Karen: Uh, huh...

Teacher: ...and really had that as a focus... I kind of think I may do that as a project every year, because it made us all focus on what was good rather than problems we might have. And I really think one of the big positive things in this room is the way the kids interact with each other and how they help each other...

Karen: Uh, huh... They do help each other.

Teacher: And now, uh, most of the time I allow that. Sometimes they have to do their work totally on their own for me to get an independent grade; but they don't object to doing it. I mean, a lot of times they'll see the reason why I need it.

Karen: Uh, huh...

Teacher: So that's been kind of interesting to me that I don't really have to battle over certain things any more.

Karen: Yeah, uh... Well, one thing with the teachers changing or even accepting change, is, I think they feel like, well, it's just more work. You know, it's more paperwork. I... I know you've had a lot of paperwork, but I think in the long run it's going to be decreased paperwork...

Teacher: Uh, huh, because they're doing more of their own...

Karen: Yeah...

Teacher: ...writing and, uh, ...

(Student interrupts for help and receives it.)

Karen: I don't know how you could approach...

Teacher: Only... only way I would know how to do it would be on an individual basis, like Barbara (referring to the teacher across the hall who teaches third grade) has seen me get excited about things, and she has wanted to get into it... and she's getting excited about things in her classroom now... and it'll just be a slow... a slow process... and maybe as they begin to get students who have learned some of these things... I would like to see if it carries over... if a child can leave this environment with the attitude about learning that they have and move to even a more structured environment and still keep that attitude, or if...

Karen: Or if it's going to change...

Teacher: Or if it's going to change... if it stops when the environment changes... Um... I feel like most of them feel very successful...

Karen: Oh, I do, too...

Teacher: ...as people, and as learners... and so I'm kind of thinking it may carry forward because that feeling is probably going to be ingrained. I'm not sure about that.

Karen: I think it probably will in most of them. You're going to have a few that...

Teacher: There are some who are going to have a struggle next year...

Karen: ...because children take on the attitude of the teacher... a lot...

Teacher: They do...

Karen: ...so... Yeah, I think it's... a lot of them... it's going to be... it's going to be a big change. It's a shame that this class could not go through another class like this one more year. And then I think that this would really stick with them...

Teacher: It would be an interesting... interesting... thing to try...

Karen: To put all of these children...

Teacher: ...these children in Barbara's room...

Karen: Yes. And then... you should really... if they had this two years in a row, you'd really... by fourth grade they would be a tremendous...

Teacher: They could go to Mary, because she also believes this...

Karen: I think you would see much, much higher scores. I think you would see more children going for accelerated diplomas in high school...

Teacher: You think it could make that big of a difference?

Karen: Yes, I do.

Teacher: Just two years?

Karen: Yes. Because, see...

Teacher: That might be a suggestion we might want to make to the administration as an experimental approach... you know...

Karen: That they go from... That this whole class just go to Barbara.

Teacher: I haven't even thought about that making a big difference...

Karen: I think it would... because I think it's really going to be... uh... some of these children could not handle some of the classes that they would be put in... because of the structure... and not necessarily the structure; because of the directions as to what to do; because of... it's going to be

a big difference... I think you would see discipline problems... from children that left out of a classroom with this type learning style without being given another year to grow and another year to mature in it...

Teacher: That's interesting... Um... that's one thing that I've really enjoyed about this... it's that I don't have discipline problems most of the time...

Karen: And most of your children are mature enough now...

Teacher: They're mature...

Karen: ...for their age...

Teacher: ...they're beginning to mature...

Karen: But I think they need another year to grow in this.

Teacher: I think that's a really good suggestion. I'm going to make that if you don't mind...

Karen: No, I don't mind...

Teacher: OK, if you have anything else...

Karen: No...

Teacher: ...I'm interested to hear it! (Laughs)

Karen: (Laughs) I think that's it!

Teacher: Thanks!

OBSERVER COMMENT: What began as an interview evolved into a conversation about the classroom and the students. There is almost a shorthand communication in the interaction between the teacher and Karen, the instructional assistant. These two have known each other for nine years in this school. They worked together for the first three of those nine years. They have remained friends throughout the years but have only worked together again this year. It is interesting to note the shorthand conversation which occurs spontaneously between the two. It is almost as if one knows what the other will say almost before she says it. Both women care deeply about children and work hard to bring out the best in them. They respect each other and the work which each does for and with students.

APPENDIX G

"INSIDER VIEW"

CONVERSATION/INTERVIEW WITH ANOTHER INSTRUCTIONAL ASSISTANT[26]

Conversation/Interview with Sarah
Classroom Instructional Assistant
March 7, 1994
10:30 a.m. - 10:45 a.m.

Teacher: Have you noticed anything in this classroom that you either think is good or not good, helpful or not helpful? What have you noticed and why do you think it makes a difference?

Sarah: I've noticed that when I come in all the children are working. I feel like it's because they feel like they have a choice where they work and what they... how they do it... They don't have to... It's not so structured. And if they choose to lie on the floor and do it, then they can do that... and they don't feel pressure. They feel like they have a choice. Whether they have a choice or not, they feel like they have a choice. Whether they're doing it or not. I see them working more steadily at a more constant pace rather than my having to say, "You're not doing your work; get busy." They tend to do it more readily, because they feel like they're choosing to do it. And I've also seen a greater appreciation for books. I've noticed this class reads more than other classes that I'm in. They tend to be excited about reading. And given a choice of reading and TV, they choose to be read to. To me, that is an extreme step forward for children. And that's what they do.

Teacher: I think so, too. In that instance where you were subbing in my classroom...

Sarah: Uh, huh...

Teacher: Um... Can you think of any way children interact with each other?

Sarah: OK, um... maybe on discipline... maybe is what I would've called this, but they tend to get along better; they tend not to argue. It still goes back to the structured thing... If you put a child sitting beside each other, and they touch each other in a structured atmosphere, they are going to argue about it because they feel like they're not supposed to do that in a structured atmosphere. In this atmosphere if they touch each other, while I'm in here, I don't see an argument, because, again, they choose to do that, and it's not, like, "Oh, no, he touched me." It's more like an accident, you know, because they're allowed freedom to move around.

Teacher: Have you noticed ways that children help each other?

Sarah: I like the one-on-one where sometimes when I come in they are paired up. It seems like it's easier sometimes for a child to help another child than for an adult to stand over and just drill this child. What I've seen is when I come in and they're working, they're working together... and they're not sitting there looking around or saying, "Oh, no, I don't know how to do this. I see when a child is helping another child, that's good, because they're not arguing.

Teacher: Do you notice that they're mostly "on task" with what they're supposed to be doing?

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26 This conversation/interview gives Sarah's evaluation of the major reason for success of this project: the allowing of choices in the classroom, affecting behavior, performance, virtually every aspect of the classroom. An excerpt from this interview may be found on pp. 63-64 of the body of this paper.

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Sarah: Yes, they are. The children are always working. They're not wandering around the room or looking aimlessly into space, wondering what to do.

Teacher: Do you think they use their time productively when they finish the assignments they are given?

Sarah: Yes, I do.

Teacher: What kinds of things do you see?

Sarah: The things that are put out for them to do are learning... hands-on learning... even though it's not a specific math sheet, the things that they are doing are helping them with their imagination. I see children in other classes that have no imagination. In here I see stories on the wall; I see pictures on the wall where they have had to think about an assignment or figure out an assignment. They've had to think about it, and they have had to use their imagination. To me, that's so important, because I see other folks who, when I take a story in and say, "We're going to write an imaginary story in reading," they don't know what an imaginary story is. They just sit there and they're just "dumbfuzzled" at how to even get started. I don't see that in here.

Teacher: So we've sort of gotten enthusiasm for reading, and behavior... time-on-task... Have you noticed their attitudes about learning or their attitudes about themselves?

Sarah: As far as their attitudes about themselves, I think they have a better attitude about themselves because... it's back to that thing where you stand over a child in a structured classroom... you stand over them and you pump and you pump and you pump... and they feel bad about themselves because they don't get it... In this atmosphere, the other children are busy, and they don't notice that you're having to work more and more with another child... And so that child feels better about himself, because when you're with another child and praising that child, sometimes he doesn't notice, and he doesn't feel like he's behind... you know what I'm saying?

Teacher: Do you feel like there's an atmosphere... um... a "risk-free" atmosphere... that it's okay to make a mistake?

Sarah: Yes. Um, hum... I think that's where the building of self-esteem comes in when they feel like they're not going to be punished... It's back to the structured thing... If you're standing over a child drilling and drilling and drilling... where this is... you know, it's okay to make a mistake and you don't have to... you know, you're not being drilled. They don't feel like they're being drilled.

Teacher: OK. Um... I think that's really important... that approximations are okay... You don't have to be perfect.

Sarah: Um, hum...

Teacher: All right, looking back to the beginning of this school year, the way we started, can you think of anything specific that was done to bring about the... What can you see as a... someone other that a teacher... about what was done to bring this climate, atmosphere, whatever you want to call it, about?

Sarah: At the beginning of the year they were loud; they were rambunctious; and they, they... I've seen them work into it, so how do I word that? I don't know exactly how to word it.

Teacher: Well, I've been looking back trying to see what I did to set this up and the things that I've kind of come up with are valuing their efforts...

Sarah: Um, hum...

Teacher: ...and, um... encouraging a lot of different types of reading... um... and really trying to foster a sense of community...

Sarah: Um, hum...

Teacher: ...rather than competition.

Sarah: Well, you also have given them... it's back to self-discipline... You've given them the opportunity to discipline themselves instead of standing over them and just really hounding them about behaving... You've given them a choice to behave, and they responded to that... whereas it's not been a structured, stand over them, you've got to sit here in this one spot. You know, that is a big difference in this classroom... where they can move about freely... and choose to be quiet because they want to be able to move about freely. However that's brought about, I don't know how to word...

Teacher: I'm not sure, either... I've been thinking about that... So the differences that you notice... I'm not wanting any names... but, like... do you think the structure is the main thing?

Sarah: Well, I feel like they feel like they have choices. It's not like... I feel like in a more structured classroom that a child does not... they're not allowed to be themselves... You know what I'm saying? They feel like there's someone over them all the time, forcing them to do...

Teacher: Which takes away their joy of...

Sarah: Um, hum... um, hum... When a person feels like they're achieving to do something... even a little person... it makes them want to do it. And that's what I see in here. At the beginning they were noisy like all the classes are, but I see in other second grade classes they are still dealing with discipline... and this classroom tends not to be doing that... they are working not dealing with discipline.

Teacher: Do you think that... I have seen some of the students really having a good attitude about what they've learned...

Sarah: um, hum... um, hum...

Teacher: ...Do you see anything along that line?

Sarah: I see that they are tickled to death so show me what they have learned. They have an enthusiasm, and they're allowed to express it. You know, and I haven't seen that in some of the other classrooms where everything has to be so hush, hush, and "tight" is the word I... You know... If they just have to be "close-knit" and they can't express... if they get a little loud, we just giggle about it, and I like that atmosphere when I come in... that I don't have to be so quiet... that we can work back here; and if we laugh, it's okay to laugh... because they're having fun and learning... and I like that...

Teacher: One of the things that I've been really tickled about is that sometimes something that I would think of as a very structured activity... that I wouldn't perceive as being something that would cause enjoyment... they love it!

Sarah: Um, hum...

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Teacher: They...

Sarah: I've seen a new enthusiasm for learning. I do.

Teacher: I do, too.

Sarah: I don't know how to word how that has been brought about...

Teacher: Well, I'm not sure, either, but I feel like some people are working close to their full potential.

Sarah: Um, hum...

Teacher: Is there anything else?

Sarah: I have enjoyed working in this room because of the atmosphere that's in here. When I come in here they're eager... they're ready... to come back here, and they're ready to work, and they're ready to learn...

Teacher: And you don't have... often... a problem with discipline at your table?

Sarah: No, no... I don't...

Teacher: Sometimes you do...

Sarah: Well, that's to be expected in any classroom a little bit, but what I have is not bad... you know, it's not bad...

(The teacher stops the interview momentarily to determine which class members are finished with assignments. One student asks to do an extra part of an assignment.)

Teacher: OK.

Sarah: You see, that's what I love! I told them they didn't have to do that part, and they chose to do it, you know... It just tickles me... Sometimes when I go home I do think about this class... how eager they are to show me what they've learned...

Teacher: And they do that when someone comes in that I want to show something that's going on... They will really explain and explain and explain...

Sarah: The days I've subbed, they've just loved it... We talked about probably each one of those pictures, you know... (She is referring to new Photo Journal pages which have Polaroid snapshots taken by each child mounted on a bulletin board in the classroom.) They're free to express themselves and they're not...

Teacher: It makes me have a lot of enjoyment because they're so enthusiastic...

Sarah: Um, hum...

Teacher: And I think probably my favorite thing is what you told me about the TV when you subbed in here.

Sarah: Um, hum...

Teacher: ...that they chose to have a story read to them rather than to have a movie.

Sarah: And they chose it twice! Two of the times that I've been in here, they chose a story over cartoons! That just... I love that!

Teacher: OK, well, if you think of something else, we'll add to it. Thank you.

OBSERVER COMMENT: The teacher and Sarah have commented to each other on various occasions concerning the ways students function in this classroom. Both are focused on the positive aspects of working with children and appreciate approximations toward success.

APPENDIX H
YET ANOTHER "INSIDER" VIEW
CONVERSATION/INTERVIEW WITH A STUDENT[27]

Conversation/ Interview with Beth
Student
March 8, 1994
9:45 a.m. - 9:55 a.m.

Teacher: What would you like to tell me about school, reading...?

Beth: I want to tell you about all of this.

Teacher: OK. What is your favorite thing to do in school?

Beth: Math is my favorite subject. I like using the computers...

Teacher: All right. Why do you like computers? What do you like about them and why?

Beth: I just think they have neat games and everything...

Teacher: All right. Do you like to write on the computer?

Beth: Yes.

Teacher: Which program do you like to use best in your writing?

Beth: Um... Let's see... I don't know...

Teacher: Um... the Print Shop... or...

Beth: Storybook Weaver...

Teacher: Why do you like that? I know before you tell me!

Beth: I like when you make the pictures. (Teacher and Beth laugh.) I like creating all the stuff.

Teacher: ... the scenery and everything?

Beth: Yeah.

Teacher: ... to go with your story? Um... I wish we could print it out in color like it is on the computer... Wouldn't that be neat? OK, besides the computer and math... I want you to really talk to me about reading and writing... or... reading and writing or school... one of those three things... And you don't have to say good things about them. If you don't like something about them, you can tell me what you <u>don't</u> like, I don't care. All right, so, think about those areas and tell me about how you feel about them.

Beth: Now, there is reading and writing... Well, I like reading, 'cause, well, I'm real interested in books. I like when they tell me so and so is going to do this and so and so is going to do that, you know, and it's something like a mystery or something... and I like them sort of like that...

Teacher: If I gave you a choice of what to read, what kind of book would you read? Would you get a basal reader, one of the library books, a science book, or social studies book... What kind of book would you choose?

Beth: I don't know... just... I like to start chapter books and...

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[27] This brief conversation gives evidence of the positive attitude and lightheartedness which is so much a part of this classroom An excerpt from this interview may be found on p. 64 of the body of this study..

Teacher: Chapter books?

Beth: Yeah. And start reading them.

Teacher: OK. Do you dread coming to school or do you like coming to school?

Beth: I love coming to school!

Teacher: Why?

Beth: I like to learn. I think you have neat stuff in your room.

Teacher: (Smiles) What do you think is neat?

Beth: You let us do projects, you know, just work on something... and you know, you'll help us a lot when we need help and all that...

Teacher: What about... Do you like the fact that I let you have a choice in what you do?

Beth: Um, hum...

Teacher: What makes that good?

Beth: Because I think I just learn better like that.

Teacher: If I told you every single thing you had to do, and I wouldn't let you get up when you finished, would you work at it as hard as you do now?

Beth: Probably I wouldn't get it finished so good... I mean, it wouldn't be comfortable for me to work in my desk, 'cause it helps me that I can wiggle around when I'm up...

Teacher: Um, hum... It does me, too.

Beth: I don't like to work in my desk.

Teacher: I can't stand to sit in one place every minute. What about working with friends? Do you prefer to work with somebody or by yourself?

Beth: With somebody.

Teacher: OK. Why?

Beth: 'Cause... I... don't know...

Teacher: Does it...

Beth: It's just... just fun!

Teacher: OK. It's fun when you're doing it with somebody? When you're doing it by yourself, it's just...?

Beth: ...It's just... just boring work...

Teacher: OK. Do you actually, when you're working with a partner, do you play around or do you get done what you're supposed to do?

Beth: Yeah. We get done what we're supposed to do and ... (wiggles hand side to side and grins)

Teacher: ...play around, too? (Laughs)

Beth: Yeah. Sorta, yeah. (Laughs, too)

Teacher: OK. Do you think most people in here really work when they're with partners or do they mostly play?

Beth: Between. Probably work a little; then they stop and start talking; then they work a little...

Teacher: OK. If you were the teacher, would you have your kids work in this way?

Beth: Yes.

Teacher: Why?

Beth: Because I just think it works better for them, 'cause they can wiggle around and, you know... It's

just "funner"!

Teacher: How do you think I feel about the children in this classroom?

Beth: I think you <u>like</u> us.

Teacher: I do. A lot! Let's see... How do you think I feel about the children as far as... Do you think I think they're smart?

Beth: I think you trust them and you think they're <u>so</u> smart...

Teacher: That's right. I want ya'll to think that, 'cause that's what I <u>do</u> think! OK. Do you have anything else you want to tell me?

Beth: No.

Teacher: OK. Thanks a lot.

OBSERVER COMMENT: Beth is a very capable girl. She reads with the third grade classroom as enrichment work. She has a great deal of insight into herself and into the classroom in general. She always helps her classmates and "mothers" those who need it. She rarely is out of patience. She reads prolifically. She has read over 350 books since school started, and it is just March now.. (Many of the books are simple ones, but she has graduated to reading chapter books and really loves that.)

APPENDIX I

"OUTSIDER" VIEW:

CONVERSATION/INTERVIEW WITH ELEMENTARY PRINCIPAL[28]

Conversation/Interview
Elementary Principal
June 2, 1994
8:45 a.m. - 9:15 a.m.

Teacher: I just wanted to know what you observed in my classroom. Did you observe any differences in what you observed this year and what you observed in the past, as far as enthusiasm of children for reading and for learning? Just what kind of general observations do you have to make?

Principal: When I entered your classroom, almost every time, students... and you... were excited. You all did not want me to leave until I heard somebody *read!* (Teacher laughs.) Which was fine and great and that made me want to stay regardless of what I had to do back up here... and several times I *did* stay and had to be hunted down... but I kept thinking, "This is what it's all about! They're excited. They *really* want to read..." and they wanted me to *hear* them read. They took pride. They were proud. I noticed pride.

Teacher: I hadn't thought about that... That's true.

Principal: They were *proud* of what they could read to me... Not just wanting to read to me because I was the principal. They were proud that they *could* read and they wanted to show me that they really liked it... and you, too... I noticed *you* were excited because you wanted me to *hear* them read because they wanted to do it so badly. I could tell it was a really good year for both of you. I think your excitement rubbed off on them.

Teacher: Well, I do, too, and I was really proud of what they accomplished. They felt... by the end of the year, *they* felt like they were really *"smart"*... and they could do things.

Principal: I think the calm way in which you approached them... Like, I saw messes in there... you know, they would make all kinds of messes... but you didn't really apologize for it. In other years you would have. In other years you would have said, "Oh, this room is a mess... " but I didn't hear that. You just said, "We're going to clean this up when we finish." You just went on, just like you had taken some type "slow-me-down" calm... you know, "I'm going to go with the flow type"... I think you took your class and just kind of "went with the flow." Because you had a couple of kids who are *definitely* not... They definitely do not *learn* the way the "average" child learns, if there is such a thing as an "average" child... You know what I'm saying.

Teacher: I didn't think this was an exceptional class as far as exceptionally well-behaved or having exceptional ability. I mean, I just felt like they were as "average" a class as any I've ever had, as far as those kinds of things.

Principal: I don't think there was a *major* discipline problem in there...

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[28] This conversation/interview gives a different perspective to classroom occurrences through the eyes of someone outside the immediate classroom interactions. An excerpt from this interview is given on p. 73 of the body of this paper.

Teacher: There *could* have been. I think probably if they had had to be very structured, I would have probably had my hands full!

Principal: How do you feel... I guess I need to ask this... How are they going to feel going to a structured classroom next year?

Teacher: I don't know... I tried to encourage...

Principal: Did you try to prepare them for it?

Teacher: Right. I did. And I tried to encourage them to be structured part of the time... In fact, on Fridays, we set the timer for two hours... They stayed in their seats for two hours... (We had breaks during that time)... and we talked about the reason for that was that there would be times when they would be required to stay in their seats for long periods of time...like during a test or other teachers mostly would expect them to do that. I think what I noticed was the fact that since they had choices *most* of the time, on the times that they *didn't* have choices, they were much more willing to do what I asked them to do... except for Jane. She really... She could *not* take whole-group instruction... ever... and do what she was supposed to do. But that's just *her* style of learning, I guess.

Principal: She definitely has her *own* style of everything, you know that. Back to the choices... I think that you probably taught them higher order thinking skills without their realizing it... by letting them choose. I didn't observe that as much as I heard you talk about it, because I was not ever in there when they were actually making a choice. Most of the time that was individual, wasn't it?

Teacher: Right, their own choices... Now, they had...

Principal: Now I saw them sitting all kinds of ways and that kind of thing...

Teacher: They had a lot of choices as to learning environment -- style--

Principal: Lying down... sitting up...

Teacher: Right. But they also had, like I was telling you before... they had choices of... even if I gave them specific assignments, which I did, every day... I gave them, usually, multiple assignments every morning, and they had the choice of the order in which to do those assignments... um... and just *that* much choice seemed to make a big difference... Even though they weren't choosing *what* they did, they could choose *where* they did it and *when* they did it. That really was all that was necessary for most of them. I didn't have trouble with anyone not finishing the work. At the beginning of the year, I did... but as they learned this choice business, they seemed to choose to finish that work and move on to their own independent projects.

Principal: I think the choice is a human nature reaction, in my opinion. You and I, definitely... I had all this work to do... I'd choose... Well, if it weren't for all the deadlines we have to meet, we'd choose what we wanted to do first. But, then, sometimes you choose to get the worst out of the way. And you probably watched them learn to do...

Teacher: It's so funny that you mentioned that... I interviewed every child right at the end of the year and asked them if they chose to do the more difficult assignments first or their easier assignments first... and there was a *big* variety. Some of them wanted to do those more

difficult assignments first to get it *over* with, and then just do what they knew they could do with less effort. Some of them wanted to do it the other way so that all they *had* was their more difficult things, basically, when they got through. So it was really amazing to me that there was such a variety... but I guess that *is* human nature.

Principal: That's an individual skill that we don't even think about, I think, and that's what a lot of our literature today is telling us... that we don't teach children, we think for them, in a structured classroom.... OK. I was guilty at some times of saying, "Do this, this, and this... Then we'll go over this"... You know, we don't teach them choices... but if you incorporated it, and they realized...

Teacher: I felt like that was one of the major, um...

Principal: You think that was one of the major...

Teacher: ...positive influences in there, and I think that was something that the instructional assistants noticed more than anything else... It's what they honed in on as being...

Principal: ...what was important. Are you going to do all of this next year?

Teacher: Yes.

Principal: Just like this? Except not document the research as much?

Teacher: Right. I felt a lot of the enjoyment came from their own... from their being able to choose their own partner to work with... I didn't make them necessarily do everything independently. They could work with whomever they chose, but then there were times when they had to do their work in their desk, by themselves, for me... and they knew it... and that didn't seem to be a problem. I was just... I was surprised at how well it worked. Now, I think maybe building community first was really beneficial.

Principal: What about with more children... You don't foresee a problem?

Teacher: I don't think so.

Principal: Well, I'm glad that you were able to do it and get your procedures and try out some things before you have a larger group.

Teacher: Next year will be...

Principal: Probably you'll have a few... I think you'll probably have twenty-three or twenty-four. I haven't done... Mr. Sims hasn't told me what I'm going to have, but I think you'll probably have a few more. You know this is a dream year...

Teacher: It was wonderful! I really just had sixteen children that were actually in my classroom all the time...

Principal: That was a dream come true.

Teacher: And I think using that photography, when we made that Celebrations! book and we started looking for good things in the class early in the year... like, that was late October, the *children* began to look for things that were good going on in the classroom. They would come to me and say "Could I take a picture?" I really think *that* focused them on the good things that were going on and helped them, you know... they just observed it and wanted to record it and... I think that was a real big part of building community in that classroom.

Principal: I think that's another pride or human nature skill... they all... We all, it's human nature... We still want to see our picture in the paper every now and then... and they want to see their picture on the...

Teacher: That's right...

Principal: I think using the photography boosted self-esteem.

Teacher: And I let them check out a lot of materials and equipment, and they were really careful with it. So one time I was interviewing one of the children and asked if she thought that I liked them, and she said, "Oh, yes, you like us," and she said, "And you trust us. You let us take home all the... " and she named all the things that I let them take home... and she said, "We always take good care of things 'cause we know you trust us." So I thought that was good that she...

Principal: That probably made you feel good...

Teacher: Um, hum... Did you see any negative things?

Principal: Ummm...

Teacher: Or do you see some things that you wish I would do differently next time?

Principal: I don't know... I'll have to *ask* this question... Did you some days... Did they know ahead of time when you were going to change pace on them and it had to be structured?

Teacher: No.

Principal: Did you...?

Teacher: We didn't have a routine of certain days we're going to be very structured... except Fridays... They knew they were going to be structured on Fridays... Friday morning...

Principal: Did some days... did they know ahead that it was going to be a really structured day, or did you just announce it that morning?

Teacher: No. I just told them.

Principal: That morning?

Teacher: Um, hum...

Principal: That... That I think could be looked at pro and con...

Teacher: You think they need to...?

Principal: I think they might need to prepare themselves mentally. I'm thinking about it from the standpoint of building self-esteem and keeping everything going that you worked hard... the trust and everything... It probably would be only some children... but I have a child that it would probably bother... if all of a sudden he got to school and the teacher changed the game plan. You see?

Teacher: Um, hum... but now, I did that off and on all throughout the year...

Principal: So they expected it?

Teacher: It wasn't something that we... that we were never structured... because sometimes we were. It really depended upon if I were doing a whole group lesson or not, but they ... They enjoyed *every* kind of learning. They *liked* whole group instruction. They *liked* doing things on the board. They would say... the most *rote* things that I might end up doing... they would say, "Ah, this is <u>fun</u>!

Principal: Was it because of the rapport you built with them?

Teacher: I think so!

Principal: Well, then, you may have approached it... See, I didn't observe that... I just know that some days you told me, "Well, we had to do it such and such a way today." And when you asked for a negative, I don't *know*, really, any negatives... I was just... You were digging, and so I *dug*... and that would be the... and I don't *know* if it's negative. I think it's how you approach it, but I think that might be something you might want to think through.

Teacher: OK. How did you feel about the fifth graders coming down there?

Principal: Oh, I have... I think any time you can do peer teaching... They learned from that, probably, as much as your children did.

Teacher: They did. I interviewed some of the fifth graders the last day of school... the ones who were available... and I had thought maybe that it had gone on too long by being a year-long thing... and I asked, "Would it be better if I had fifth graders change every six-weeks, so that you wouldn't have to do it for such a long period of time?" "Oh, no, no!" They liked it, and most of them were just missing their snack time; a few missed some of their spelling, and they had to do extra spelling homework every night that they came with me... which was, like, *every* night... and they didn't care, because they really enjoyed the...

Principal: I think the long and...

Teacher: ...and it was just a very short period of time... twenty minutes...

Principal: Well, I trusted the teachers to monitor it... I trust that they didn't let anybody come that let their grades fall because of it...

Teacher: There was one child who started coming and wasn't able to come, and...

Principal: OK.

Teacher: ...because of his behavior...

Principal: That would be my only concern there... that those kids don't... it wouldn't take away from them.

Teacher: And I thought it interesting that some of the ones that I had had when they were in second grade that I knew were not "tip-top" students but that they put out a lot of effort... I thought it would be good for them... I had them come and I had them work with some of my students who were struggling, sort of, as they had when they were in second grade. They were *really* caring, and, ah... especially boys, I noticed this...

Principal: Sometimes you don't want your "tip-top" students -- they get bored.

Teacher: Um, hum... In fact, I put my "tip-top" students with "tip-top" students this year, so that they wouldn't know more than the ones listening to them read.

Principal: I thought that that was great! Any time you can use peers, I think you...

Teacher: And my students told me as they left that when they were in fifth grade, they would like to come back and do that for me... as fifth graders... so they're, you know, anticipating...

Principal: That's good. That's a compliment. I hope that can work out. Any time we can do that...

Teacher. OK. So do you have any other comments?

Principal: No, I can't think of anything.

APPENDIX J
OTHER "OUTSIDER" VIEWS:
PROGRAM COMMENDATION FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT[29]

County Schools

BOARD MEMBERS

COUNTY SCHOOLS

P. O. Box 887 /

Telephone (205)

Dr.
Superintendent

April 4, 1994

Mrs. Margaret Cherry
Memorial School
901 Avenue

Dear Mrs. Cherry:

I am well aware of the exploration of innovative approaches to literacy learning being implemented in your classroom this year. Your research concerning effective literacy practices and environment will certainly enable your students to explore their own strengths and preferences in literacy learning. It is my understanding this research will satisfy a project requirement for your Ed. S.

Your focus on community building and choice as integral parts of your study is certainly a strength. The decision-making responsibilities assumed by the students combined with the cooperative rather than competitive perspective should greatly enhance the learning climate of your classroom.

I look forward to reviewing the results of your study.

Sincerely,

Superintendent

/wte

"EDUCATION DOESN'T COST —— IT PAYS"

[29] Some identifying information in the letterhead and throughout this letter has been covered in order to maintain anonymity.

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PROGRAM COMMENDATION FROM THE PRINCIPAL[30]

MEMORIAL SCHOOL
Office Of The Principal
801 Avenue
AL 35

May 20, 1994

Ms. Margaret Cherry
Memorial School
Second Grade Teacher
Elementary Office

Dear Ms. Cherry:

Congratulations again on receiving the Dean's Award at UAB as well as your success this year in implementing your styles of learning classroom project. I have been impressed with what I have seen going on in your classroom this year relative to your varied instructional approaches to learning. Certainly I have been pleased with the impact you have made on your pupils this year.

I read the letter you wrote Dr. and I agree entirely with your comments and assessment. Again, congratulations, and thank you very much for the dedication and superior teaching I have seen demonstrated as you carried out your instructional objectives.

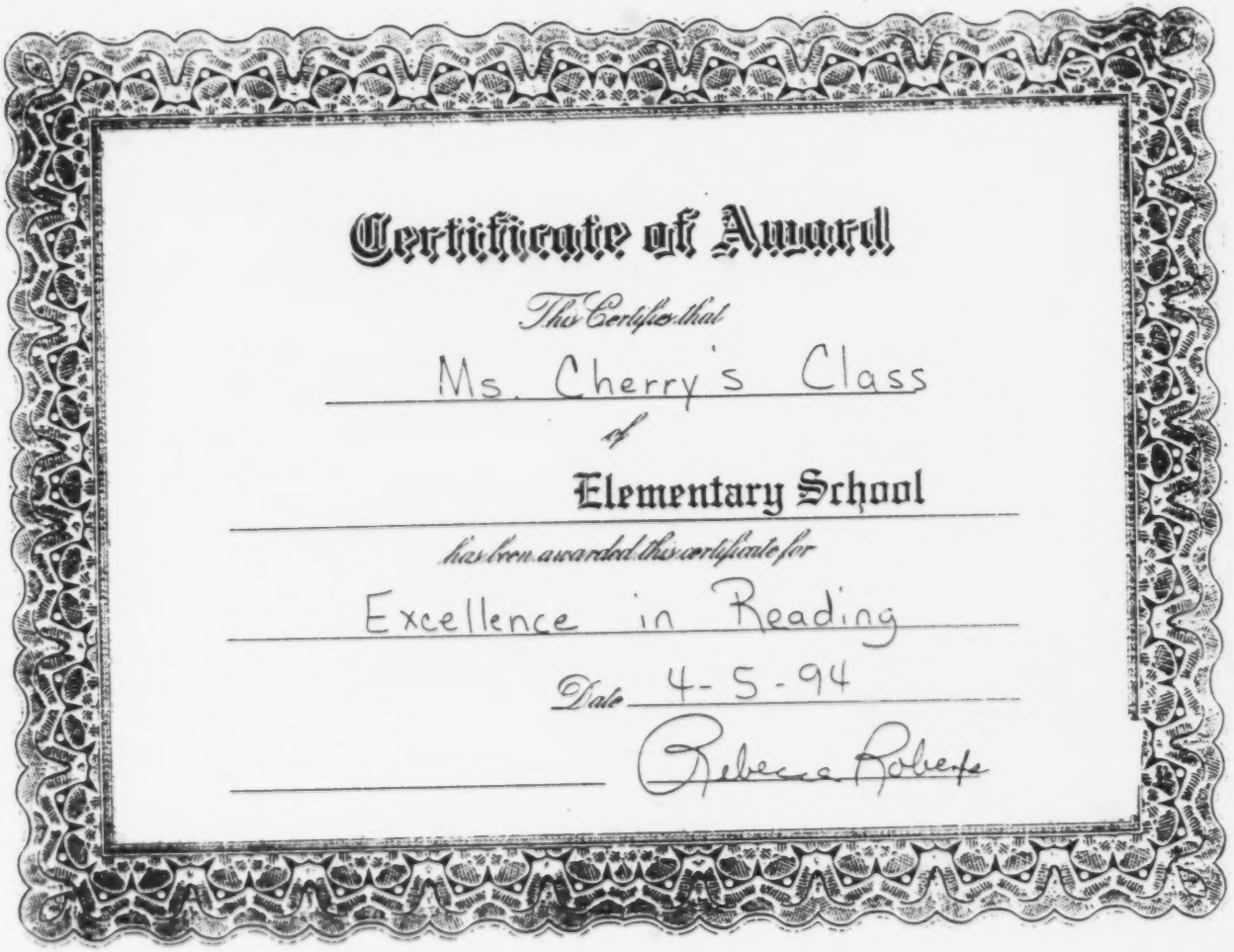
Sincerely,

Principal

C: Dr.
Dr. .
Mrs.
Mrs.

[30] Some identifying information in the letterhead and throughout the letter has been covered in order to preserve anonymity.

PROGRAM COMMENDATION FROM THE ELEMENTARY PRINCIPAL[31]



Certificate of Award

This Certifies that

Ms. Cherry's Class

of

Elementary School

has been awarded this certificate for

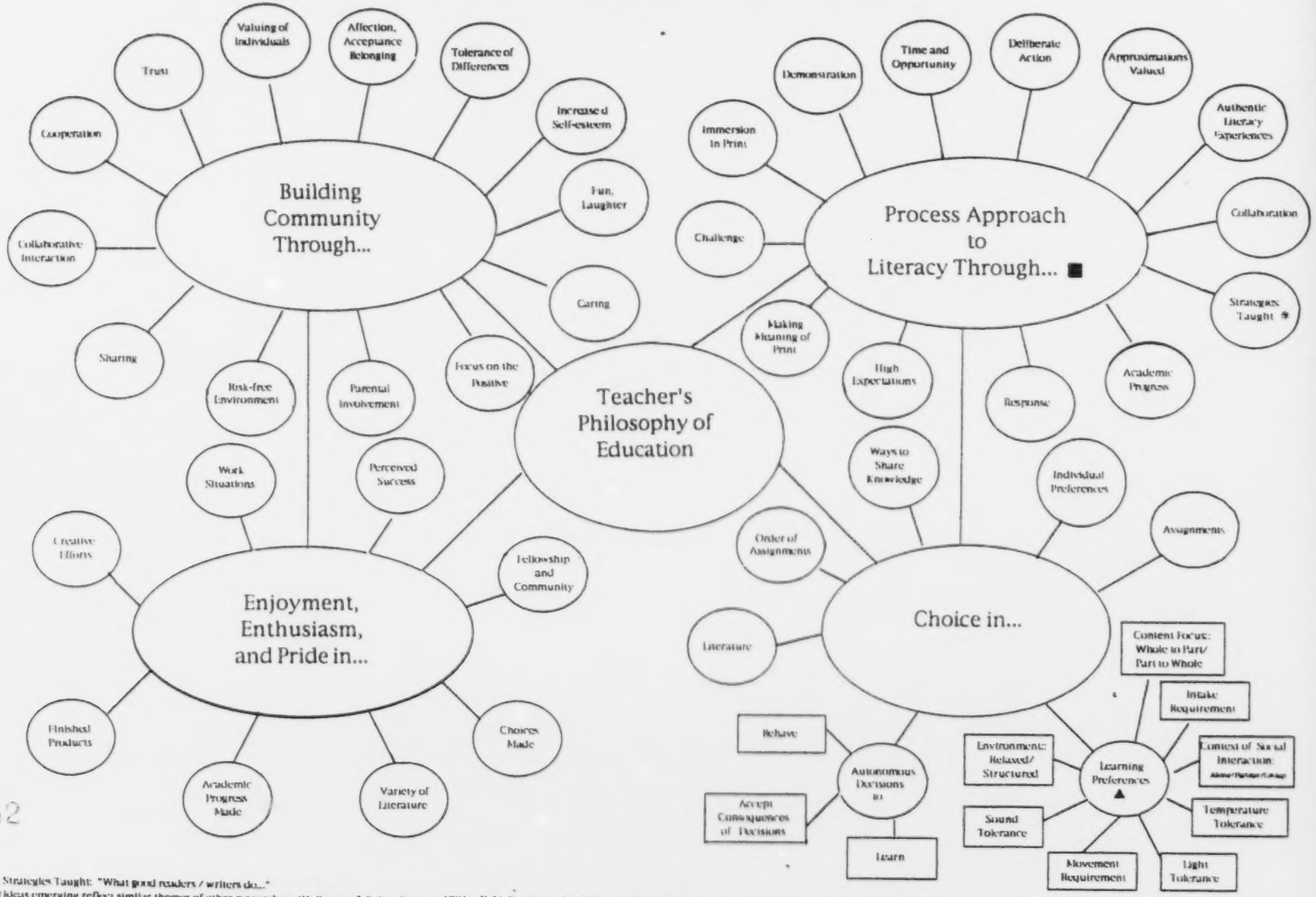
Excellence in Reading

Date 4-5-94

Rebecca Roberts

[31] Portions of this award have been covered to preserve anonymity.

Key Ideas Emerging Through Research...



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* Strategies Taught: "What good readers / writers do..."

■ Ideas emerging reflect similar themes of other researchers (H. Browne & B. Cambourne, 1991; Y. M. Goodman, D. J. Watson, & C. L. Burke, 1987; G. Manning, M. Manning, & R. Long, 1989; R. Peterson, 1992).

▲ Ideas emerging reflect similar themes of other researchers (M. Carbo, 1992; R. Dunn & K. Dunn, 1978).

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